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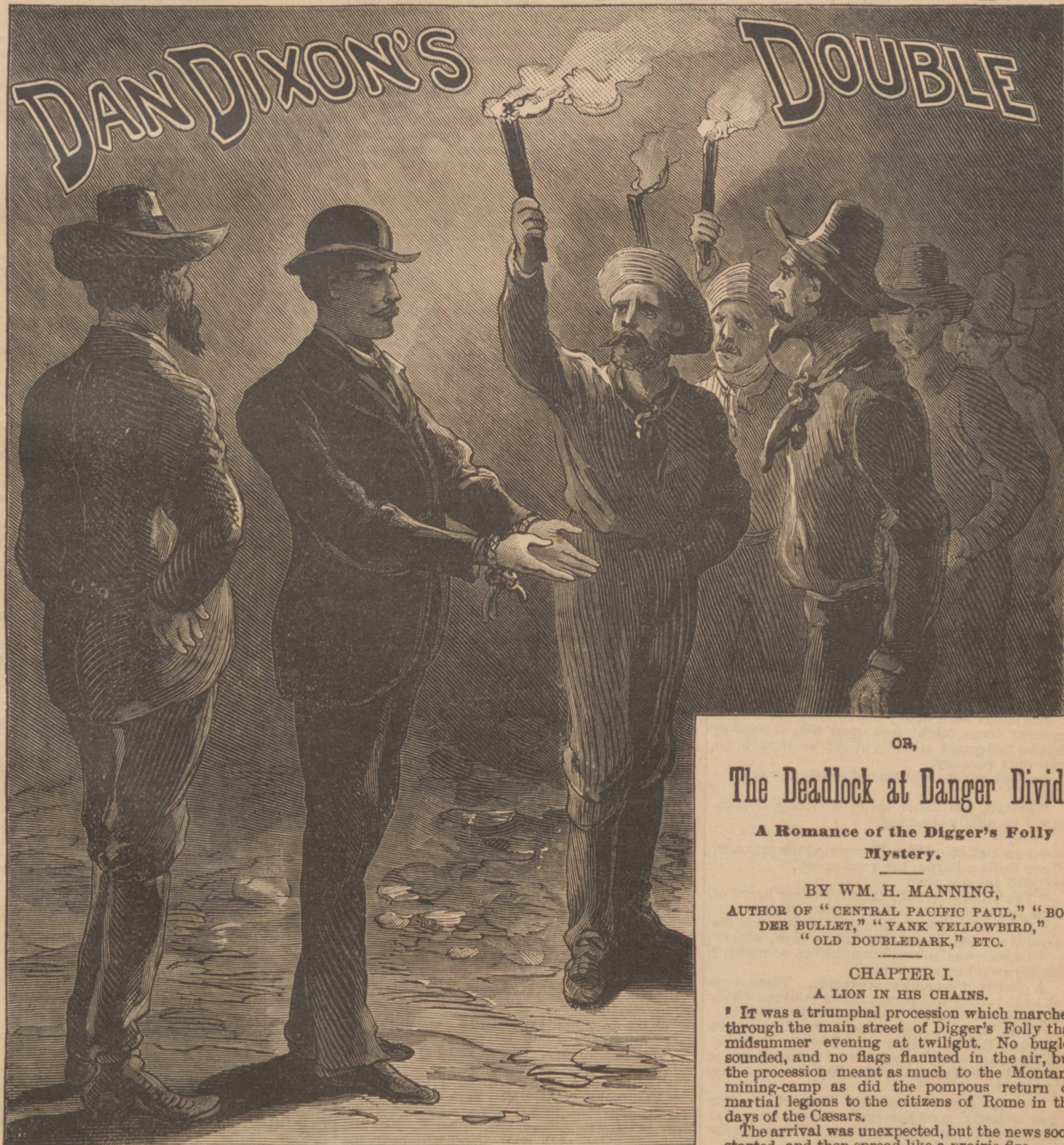
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## OR, The Deadlock at Danger Divide.

A Romance of the Digger's Folly  
Mystery.

BY WM. H. MANNING,  
AUTHOR OF "CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL," "BORDER BULLET," "YANK YELLOWBIRD,"  
"OLD DOUBLEDARK," ETC.

### CHAPTER I. A LION IN HIS CHAINS.

IT was a triumphal procession which marched through the main street of Digger's Folly that midsummer evening at twilight. No bugles sounded, and no flags flaunted in the air, but the procession meant as much to the Montana mining-camp as did the pompous return of martial legions to the citizens of Rome in the days of the Cæsars.

The arrival was unexpected, but the news soon started, and then spread like a prairie fire.

"Bullion Baron is captured!" It meant a good deal to those who heard it.

"I AM NOT DAN DIXON!" REPEATED THE PRISONER, "NOR BULLION BARON, THE ROAD-AGENT!" "OH! YES YOU ARE."

For weeks which had lengthened into months—almost to years—Danger Divide had been subjected to a genuine road-agent reign of terror. There had been toll levied on Rolling Trail which, in its proportions, put even the taxes of civilization to the blush.

All this had been the work of a man who called himself Bullion Baron, and the fact that the audacious outlaw had been captured, at last, put Digger's Folly in a state of great excitement.

Men, women and children rushed out of their dwellings to look upon the notorious brigand.

By the time that the news had gone abroad fairly, the triumphal procession had reached the public square. There it was obliged to pause. Sheriff Henry Williams heard the calls of the people for a view of the prisoner, and he saw no good reason why he should refuse to comply with their common request.

By his order torches were brought, in order to get a strong light. Gas was an unknown feature at Digger's Folly—even the commonest of street lamps were unknown.

Digger's Folly was not a grand or a large place. It could no longer be termed a mining-camp; it had grown, and was growing, rapidly; but it was only a few years before when the first pick turned soil in the vicinity. Success had not at first rewarded the diggers, and, even when gold began to be found abundantly, the name of its days of ill-luck held to it.

In one sense, the location was of the best. Situated in the heart of the range known as Danger Divide, many peaks towered above the town in rough, but grand, immobility.

As soon as possible the torches were brought, and all looked eagerly to see the captive. Opinions were divided as to whether he would prove to be a demon of ugliness or a dashing Adonis, with the weight of belief in favor of the first possibility.

No one knew any good of Bullion Baron. He had never killed any one while acting as a road-agent, as far as was known, but had come unpleasantly near it. When resisted he had the disagreeable habit of putting a bullet through a victim's arm or leg, as best suited his ends, and many cripples were going about the wide country whose bones would never be so good as before their owners met the outlaw. He had never shown a spark of chivalry. Tradition told of road-agents who were polite to women, and would never rob travelers of valued family keepsakes, but Bullion Baron cared not a breath for sentiment. He had robbed and shot until he was despised as much as he was feared.

Consequently, the general impression was that, now he was stripped of his mask of former days, he would prove to be both brutal and ignorant of appearance.

Instead of this they saw a well-formed, agreeable-looking young man who was plain of dress and face, but united refinement and intelligence, which made him far from a monster to look at; with well-trimmed hair and modest garments which did not make him a dandified dare-devil in appearance.

But the surprise did not stop there.

"Dan Dixon!" cried a voice in the crowd, impulsively.

"Right!" responded Sheriff Williams; "this is the man who bamboozled us all, and passed for an honest prospector."

"The villain ought to be lynched!" declared some one in the crowd.

"Gently! We don't do things that way here."

"But he deceived us so!"

"True. He lived among us quite awhile, enjoyed our friendship, ate our bread, received our hands in confidence, and played hobbs with our judgment."

Thus far the prisoner had listened in silence; if he had been asleep, he could not have acted more unconscious of what was going on around him.

His hands were firmly bound, and the veriest coward there might look upon him in safety; but he had gazed straight ahead, as though he saw only vacancy.

At the last words he turned slowly toward the sheriff.

"Friend, you labor under a wrong impression," he mildly observed.

"Eh?"

"I am not Dan Dixon!" repeated the prisoner, "nor Bullion Baron, the road-agent!"

"Oh! yes you are."

"The name is strange to me; I never heard of Dan Dixon; nor of Bullion Baron, either."

"Gammon! Didn't you live among us for several months, pretending to be a prospector?"

"I never was in this town before to-night; I do not even know its name."

A chorus of remonstrances arose. There were at least twenty-five persons there who were willing to swear that the prisoner was Dan Dixon.

"But," added a deep voice, "Dan Dixon ain't no more Bullion Baron than I be the Prince o' Whales, an' everybody knows my cognomen is plain Tobias Partridge, the Sky Gazelle o' the Woods!"

The man who claimed this ill-matched name was a burly, good-humored fellow who prided himself on being a retired miner. He needed nobody to vouch for him.

"Many of you must be surprised," Williams

pursued, "but I must say, even when Dixon lived at Digger's Folly, there were those who suspected that he might be Bullion Baron. I have been acting on the theory for some time, and the proof is now complete."

"Proof!" echoed the prisoner, with a curling lip.

"Yes, proof. We found the famed horse of the road-agent in your possession."

"Pardon me, but you did not!"

"Do you deny it?"

"I do."

"But I saw the horse—"

"Beyond doubt, but if, as I suppose is true, you have had a road-agent around here, that outlaw never owned my brown horse. That animal has been in my possession for years—ever since he was old enough to bear a saddle."

"Yet you deny that you are the road-agent?"

"I do. Most emphatically!"

"Perhaps you will give your name?"

"It is Gun-stock."

"Do you give that name to mock us?"

"I give it because it is my own."

A man who had been pushing through the crowd now arrived at Williams's side and curtly exclaimed:

"What better proof do we want of his guilt than such an absurd name?"

"True, Mr. Merton."

"Nobody was ever named 'Gun-stock,' yet, and he who will not tell his real name must be afraid to. I, myself, recognize the prisoner as Daniel Dixon, but, as a matter of form, it is well to have him fully identified before committing him to jail."

This idea met with approval. Benjamin Merton was a lawyer, and a man whom no one would set down as being unjust. He was somewhat inclined to be fanatical in his desire to deal out the law, but, strict though he was, he never let any personal feeling influence him against the accused.

Sheriff Williams directed the leading men of Digger's Folly to come forward, and then he went through the form of introducing them.

"This, prisoner, is Mr. Lewis Jackson, agent for the railroad we hope to see put a terminus in our town, some day. Do you recognize the prisoner, Mr. Jackson?"

"He is Dan Dixon!" Jackson replied, and moved on to make room for the next.

"This is Mr. Emory Lombard, capitalist, and Commissioner of Public Improvements."

"The prisoner is Daniel Dixon!" Lombard pronounced, and then walked on.

"This is Jonas Hutchinson, capitalist and money-lender."

Jackson and Lombard had spoken moderately, but Hutchinson was venomous in his identification. He had lost money at the hands of Bullion Baron, and hated him bitterly.

Hutchinson made the usual identification, and others followed him until the point appeared to be settled beyond question.

"You see how it is, prisoner," observed Williams.

"I don't see how it is!" retorted the man, who had listened in utter silence.

"Eh?"

"These men are wrong. I am not, and never was, known as Dan Dixon. My name is Gun-stock! That, and nothing more."

"Do you think we could be at fault in regard to a man who lived among us for a long time?"

"You have proved that you can. You are at fault; I am not he!"

"Rubbish!" exclaimed the sheriff, out of patience. "I'll waste no more words upon you. To jail you go, at once!"

"Wait!" Gun-stock directed. "I demand a formal examination before I am committed. If I understand you correctly, this Bullion Baron, for whom I am mistaken, is an outlaw who has many crimes laid at his door. It is a serious matter to be shut up as his representative, double, or whatever you see fit to call it. I ask for a legal examination."

"You will have that at your trial."

"That may be too late," was the impressive reply. "I give you credit for showing a very moderate spirit now—though you did anything else when you and your men were running me down—but the majority of the crowd here do not follow your lead."

Gun-stock paused and gave a critical glance along the mass of threatening faces.

"These misguided men," he added, "would take great pleasure in lynching me!"

"Nonsense!" Williams cried.

"Ask them for yourself."

"But I should not allow it."

"Suppose that they rise as a body—could you defeat them?"

"What is that you desire?" interrupted Benjamin Merton.

"A due examination before a magistrate, before I am committed to jail."

"Our city judge is absent, and I am his legal representative."

"Then I desire such a hearing before you."

"You shall have it. You show a lack of confidence in us, but it shall never be said that we deal harshly with any one. Sheriff, take the prisoner to the City Hall, and I will hear the evidence."

"I thank you," impressively returned Gun-stock. "I ask only justice, and, if I must stand accused of being this Bullion Baron—of whom I have no knowledge—I would know just what your claims are. I will not forget your courtesy."

It had been a very moderate conversation, and Williams and Merton certainly showed a commendable spirit in dealing with the accused.

They did not represent the feeling of the crowd, however; Gun-stock had spoken no more than the truth when he said that the lynching spirit was rampant among the people.

Bullion Baron had been the terror and the curse of Danger Divide. He had made travel unsafe there; he had stolen large sums from the rich and small sums from the poor; and his habit of giving men disabling wounds on little, or no provocation, had made him heartily hated by all.

At certain times he had referred to himself as "The War-Eagle," and he combined the merciless tendencies of the king of the sky with the ferocity of a tiger.

No act of humanity, consideration or gallantry was known which would offset his crimes.

Digger's Folly, as a whole, was delirious with joy to hear the War-Eagle had been captured. Many men whispered that the quickest, safest and most desirable way was to give the notorious criminal a short shift and he done with it.

However, easy as Merton and Williams had been, no one believed that they would weaken; they were inexorable in their discharge of duty.

So, when the prisoner was taken to the City Hall, no one feared that he would escape.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PRISONER'S FRIEND.

BENJAMIN MERTON's family consisted, besides himself, of his daughter, Rachel, and his niece, Beatrice Elberdean. The latter was an orphan, and had for six years been under the lawyer's care. She was twenty-two years old; Rachel was two years her junior.

Cousins though they were, there was a great difference in the natures of the two girls.

Beatrice was self-confident; Rachel was inclined to depend upon others. Beatrice was one who might well receive the description, "tall and queenly," and her carriage and her facial appearance suggested pride and resolution; Rachel was rather below the average size of her sex, and seemed desirous of so moving and speaking that no one would notice her.

Rachel thought the world a very good kind of a world, but it frightened her to think that she—so insignificant—must act a part in it; Beatrice looked at the world critically, considered it a humbug, and felt able to deal with it and with all the people in it.

Beatrice was often thought haughty and cold, but was neither. She was simply firm and critical.

Rachel was often pronounced weak, but was merely timid, and her most captious critics had to confess that she was intelligent and charming.

Both girls had more than the average of good looks.

Beatrice was sitting in her room at the time when the man who saw fit to call himself Gun-stock was confronting his captors in the Square. Although not particularly given to matters literary, she was, just then, going slowly and thoughtfully through the majestic measures of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and was a willing captive to his beauties of diction and grandeur of ideas.

Suddenly the door opened, and Rachel entered.

One glance was enough to show Miss Elberdean that something was wrong. Her cousin's face was pale, her blue eyes were large and startled.

Rachel tried to speak, but could not.

"My dear, what is it?" asked Beatrice, kindly but composedly.

"They've caught him!" faltered Rachel.

"Caught whom?"

"Dan Dixon."

"Who in the world is Dan Dixon?"

"He was the prospector."

"I think I have heard of him."

"And, oh! Beatrice, they are very stern and angry!"

Rachel clasped her hands and looked like the personification of grief and dismay.

"Pray," calmly asked Miss Elberdean, "why should we care if they—whoever 'they' may be—have caught him?"

"They say he is Bullion Baron!"

"So the notorious outlaw is taken?"

"It is false!—false!" cried Rachel, wildly.

Beatrice put Milton carefully away on the shelf by Shakespeare's side.

"My dear," she steadily replied, "I think we ought to have an understanding. Allow me to catechize you. What do you care if Bullion Baron is captured?"

"He is not captured; it is Dan Dixon."

"We still grope in the dark, but, if I understand you aright, there is a man under arrest charged with being the War-Eagle, who really is Dan Dixon."

"That is it."

"Allow me to ask—what is Dan Dixon to you?"

Rachel's pale face flushed.

"I—I thought—I am sure he is not the War-Eagle!"

"You must be acquainted with Mr. Dixon?"

Rachel looked steadfastly at the floor and blushed even more.

"I am," she faltered.

"You never told me!"

"No."

"Deep Rachel!"

"Oh, Beatrice, I was afraid to!"

"Shallow Rachel! Should I have bitten your head off? Am I an oger? Am I your judge?"

Rachel never knew how to understand Miss Elberdean when she was in this mood. There was much that was like banter and irony in her words at such times, but her calm composure bore no trace of levity.

"Don't laugh at me!" sighed Rachel.

"Assuredly not. So you are interested in this Daniel who prospects for gold?"

"Beatrice, I am acquainted with him!"

"So I perceive. Really, I am interested. I have never seen this young man, but I infer that he must be above the ordinary level of his sex. No doubt he is possessed of a manly form, a handsome face, a front like Mars and a manner like Romeo. Very likely, besides combining all that is valiant and gentle, he is chivalrous and gentlemanly."

"He is—he is!" cried Rachel, charmed by her cousin's eloquence.

"Add to this," calmly pursued Miss Elberdean, "that he is Bullion Baron, and we have the picture complete!"

Rachel burst into tears.

"Beatrice, you are cruel!" she sobbed.

The accused lady arose and put her hand gently upon her companion's bowed head.

"Foolish Rachel!" she replied. "Did I ever turn a deaf ear to your troubles? No; nor do I begin now. Let me hear of this Daniel. You met him; you liked him; you—loved him!"

"I couldn't help it!" cried Rachel, not in self-reproach, but with enthusiasm.

"Mr. Dixon should think himself lucky. He was, if I am correctly informed, a young man who lived in a hut at the outskirts of the town, and pursued the business of a gold-prospector?"

"You are right."

"You met him—where and how?"

"At Tobias Partridge's shanty. Mrs. Partridge was Daniel's washerwoman, as she was ours. I met him there, and—and our acquaintance began."

"I see. Proceed!"

"I saw him often after that, but, somehow, I never told you, or father. You see, Beatrice—here Rachel hid her face on her cousin's shoulder—I liked him, and hated to confess it."

"Were you as reluctant to confess to him?"

"I did confess—when he asked me!"

A shadow flitted over Miss Elberdean's face.

"Rachel, do you really love the man?"

"Yes! And now—oh! Beatrice, he is arrested and accused of being Bullion Baron. Think of that!—and I his promised wife! But, the charge is false! He is not the War-Eagle; he is innocent!"

Slowly Beatrice passed her hand over the sunny head bowed upon her shoulder. She was troubled. She would have laughed down this fancy if she dared, but, seeing that the matter was too serious, she would not wound the weeping girl by even a word of censure.

Skillfully asking questions, she learned more about the past, and all about the present that Rachel could tell.

"Did you see the prisoner, yourself?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And it was really Dixon?"

"Yes."

"Then he is in trouble."

"He is in deadly danger. They spoke—oh! Beatrice, some of the miners spoke of lynching!"

"Be calm! That will never be allowed at Digger's Folly. You say they are giving him a chance to speak. Does he not prove his innocence?"

"He says he is not Bullion Baron, and—he says, too, that he is not Dan Dixon."

"But you are sure he is?"

"Yes; how could I be mistaken?"

"The young man is foolish. By falsely denying what can be proved easily, he weakens the force of his denial that he is Bullion Baron."

"What are we to do? What can we do?"

Miss Elberdean looked pitifully at the sorrowful face lifted to her own. An hour before she would have smiled with scorn at the idea of her going to investigate a man accused of being the notorious road-agent, but it was very different when she saw Rachel in trouble.

"First of all," she answered, "I will go and learn how the affair is progressing. You spoke of meeting Mr. Dixon at Tobias Partridge's. Is Tobias his friend or his foe?"

"His friend. He always was, and, even now, he denies that Dan is the War-Eagle."

Beatrice had arisen and taken down a light shawl.

"Are you really going out?" Rachel continued.

"Yes. Do you wish to accompany me?"

"I? No, no. Not unless—I can help Daniel."

"You cannot."

Miss Elberdean was ready to go. She started, paused, looked kindly at Rachel, and then added:

"Be of good cheer. I will do what I can."

Then she left the house. On the way she had time for thought, and what she did think was in her usual practical vein.

"I marvel at myself. No one ever accused me of eccentricity, yet this is certainly a wild, Quixotic errand. Who would suspect me of going out as an electioneering agent for a man accused of being Bullion Baron? Nonsense! I am no agent of his; I go for Rachel's sake. Poor Rachel! I always suspected that she would get into trouble, for she is one of those unfortunate women who were born with hearts. Thank Heaven! I am not of that style. Men are all well enough in their place, but I would as soon think of worshiping a locomotive or a plow. Both these things are useful, and just as noble as the talking machines called men!"

It was a great relief to Rachel's agent that she was able to take such a lofty position. Most of all, she was sincere.

In no sense was she a man-hater, but admire the alleged lords of creation she did not.

When she neared the City Hall she saw that there was a crowd of women and children outside, and she approached them.

"What is being done in the Hall?" she asked.

"They are giving Bullion Baron a hearing," was the reply.

"For what purpose?"

"Merton and Williams are too easy with the red-handed ruffian!" explained a woman, bitterly.

"But, what is the object of the hearing?"

"He denies that he is the War-Eagle."

"And is forcing them to prove it?"

"Prove it! Half of Digger's Folly can do that."

"Then why is this delay?"

"Why, the scoundrel is making a speech. There he stands, talking like a lawyer paid by the minute, and not a word does he say that is to the point. Ignoring the irrefragable evidence against him, he denies that he is the road-agent, and is talking like a cyclone. He says that his name is Gun-stock, but won't tell where he hails from, or name any one who can testify in his behalf. Instead, he's making a dry, legal speech, which has no bearing on this case."

"He's killing time," added a second woman.

"But, why?"

"Providence knows. I don't, and I doubt if he does."

"One word: Is he really Dan Dixon?"

"I'll swear to it!"

Miss Elberdean turned away.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE TEMPTATION OF TOBIAS.

ANXIOUS to see Tobias Partridge quietly, Beatrice was somewhat at a loss how to find him without making inquiries, but chance favored her. She saw the ex-miner just inside a window, standing upon a box, and staring with open eyes and mouth at Gun-stock, who was making a speech more fit for legislative halls than for a mining-camp, and such an occasion.

Beatrice forgot Tobias in her curiosity to see the object of all this uproar and anxiety.

Perhaps the light, or the scene, flattered the prisoner, for he now looked really handsome, and, standing on the platform, his shapely, muscular form and manly face showed off to good advantage.

Beatrice listened.

Gun-stock had a remarkable flow of language, and his choice of words and his voice were alike pleasing, but Miss Elberdean was amazed to find that he was giving an account of a trial for burglary in Rhode Island, and explaining the arguments of the opposing counsel.

What all this had to do with his own case no one present could decide.

The prisoner certainly seemed to be trying to kill time, and to postpone his fate.

Feeling no interest in all this, Beatrice touched Tobias's arm, and, when he looked around, beckoned him to follow her. He obeyed, and they were soon at a private place.

"Mr. Partridge, what do you think of that matter?" she quietly asked.

"Think it's a howlin' shame!" Tobias declared.

"Then you consider the prisoner innocent?"

"Of course he is. Why, my wife did his washin'."

"Is that a proof of his innocence?"

"Sartain! No man could be a rascal in clothes which Polly washed. Dan Dixon paid her a dollar a week, too. Him, guilty? Wal, I reckon not!"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Me?"

"Certainly."

"Wal, I'd say a few 'cuss' words, I reckon, only Polly says as how her clothes don't come clean easy ef I break that amendment."

"Can you do no more than to talk?"

"I've retired from activ'e work, an' my only

connection with the world is ter let Polly take in washin'."

"For which you ought to be heartily ashamed; but that is not to the point. You have always professed to be the friend of young Dixon. You see him in trouble now. What are you going to do about it?"

Tobias had been careless enough up to this point, but Beatrice's short, sharp sentences brought him out of his vagabondish mood. He gazed steadily at the queenly young lady.

"What kin I do?" he returned.

"Save him!"

"How?"

"The ways can be considered when you have agreed."

"Does Miss Rachel wish it ter be so?"

"Why do you ask?"

"The frien'ship I bear fur Dan ain't much in comparison ter his feelin's fur the lawyer's darter. Fur he's the boy would wade in seas that run mount'ins high, or swim in oceans o' liquid flame or lava. That is," Tobias meditatively added, "he almost would do it. Mebbe he'd want the lava cooled off an artom."

"All things considered, his life seems to be valuable."

"Tis that."

"Is the proof strong against him?"

"Wal, it seems thar was them who always doubted Dan, an' when Sheriff Williams took up the trail ag'in' him, Dan slipped away strangely. Sheriff he kep' peggin' away, an' he found a hoss in Dan's possession said to hev been Bullion Baron's, an' he found a mask thar sech as the War-Eagle used, an' when he talked with the boy Dan refused ter tell his name, except ter say 'twas Gun-stock, an' he denied that he was Dan an' wouldn't explain whar he hailed from or nothin' else."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Then there is no actual evidence?"

"No."

"Yet it will go hard with him."

"Think so?"

"Yes."

"By hokey! wish I could get him away!"

"You can!"

"How?"

"The jail is considered very strong, is it not?"

"Yes."

"We must save him before he is confined there."

Tobias shook his head slowly.

"Don't skeerely see how it kin be done. Jest now, the eye of 'most all our people is upon him, an' when he gits through with that remarkable speech o' his'n, he'll be marched straight to jail."

Beatrice frowned. Every word that he said was true, and she knew it. How were they to take Gun-stock away from his numerous enemies?

Plainly, if done at all it must be by some bold stroke, and she did not see her way clear.

"Ef we're ketched at it," Tobias added, "we may as well rumble over our verses an' prepare ter cross the river Styx in Chariot's canoe."

It was an unpleasant reminder. Beatrice knew that the people would be very angry, but it was not of that she thought. Their most bitter rage would move her less than the knowledge that she might be giving aid to Bullion Baron.

The prisoner was accused. Possibly he was guilty. The War-Eagle had been a merciless scourge, and she would have recoiled at the idea of defeating the claims of justice.

Nothing but her devotion to Rachel kept her true to the purpose she had in mind. For her cousin's sake, she would risk all on the hope that the prisoner was not the scourge of Danger Divide.

"Can we in any way render the jail uninhabitable?" she asked, doubtfully.

"We might burn it down."

"For shame, Tobias Partridge!"

"Did I advise it?" the ex-miner asked, reproachfully.

"Is there no other way?"

"I don't know of none."

Beatrice was silent so long that Tobias added:

"Can't we ax Lawyer Merton to put in a good word fur him?"

"Impossible!" answered Miss Elberdean, hurriedly. "Mr. Merton must never hear of this. He does not know that his daughter ever met this man Dixon, and must not learn it. Neither must he know of my own Quixotic work. Uncle Merton is a good man, but he is prevented by that very fact from giving sympathy to a criminal."

"What kin we do?"

"Do you know where the key of the jail is kept?"

catamounts! whar would Tobias Partridge be, then?"

"I think you can arrange that."

"Mebbe; but what of the sociable hyar breaks up, an' I'm ketched at the jail?"

"I will keep them here."

"You?"

"I!"

"How kin you?"

"I was once on a stage when Bullion Baron robbed it. Of course he was masked as usual, and I did not see his face, but I can convince these honorable gentlemen that trifles weigh in making a recognition. As Mr. Merton's niece I shall receive attention—"

"Several other ladies hev been heerd afore ye."

"Good! Then they will hear me, and I shall not—disgrace myself so much by appearing there."

Miss Elberdean hesitated over the words, and, really, felt greatly humiliated by the mere thought of the work she was engaged upon, but she remembered Rachel and would not waver.

"Wal, you keep the gang hyar, an' I'll go an' git the key. What next?"

"Throw it away! It would be thought sacrilege to break down the door of the new jail, and, rather than do that, the prisoner will be kept in the City Hall over night. If we can arrange it that way, we will liberate him before the dawn of another day!"

"Jes' so."

Tobias's answer was not cheerfully pitched. He would as soon undertake to lift Mount Nibbletoe—the highest peak of Danger Divide—and carry it on his back, as to get Gun-stock away from his numerous, bitter enemies. However, Tobias admired Miss Elberdean, and was willing to do anything for her.

"Next," pursued the fair Napoleon, "I must have a companion with whom to enter the court-room. Am I right in thinking that Mrs. Partridge is friendly to this man Dixon?"

"She jest adores him, mum! Polly Partridge is a mighty fine woman, ef I do say it. She's got good judgment, too. I tol' her that when she said she'd marry me, an' it's proved so. I've always been solicitudinous o' her comfort. Why, when I retired from activye business life, I said to her, says I, 'Polly, ter keep you from bein' lonesome, you kin take in washin'; but I limit yer labors ter ten hours a day. Not an hour over that, Polly,' says I, with warmth; 'not an hour over that!'"

"And she can be trusted fully in this case?"

"She kin."

"Enough! Go your way!"

Tobias went, feeling as cheerful as if he were going to prison for five years, and not sure but that would be the result of it. If his fellow-citizens caught him at the work which was before him, there was strong probability that he might not have a chance to tread the streets of Digger's Folly another night for years to come.

"Why, it might even be that Poliy Partridge would be left a widder!" he moaned, beating his breast tragically.

While he went one way Beatrice went the other. As she had expected, she found Polly at home, engaged in washing. She had planned to ascertain the good woman's mind before betraying her own ideas, but Polly at once broke forth into a series of lamentations and criticisms which showed just where she stood.

Then Beatrice made known her errand.

Mrs. Partridge promptly flung down a pile of damp garments and dried her hands.

"I'm with ye!" she announced. "Dan is as innocent as a lamb, an' we'll hev him out!"

"We must be wily—"

"We must! I'm a woman o' few words, but what I say an' do is ter the p'nt. I hate shilly-shally an' verbrawsity. I've knowned fur a long time that Rachel Merton an' Dan'l had a tender feelin', an' I put my benediction on ter it. I was young myself, once, an' so was Tobias; though he's more like a dried-up cobweb now than a gallant beau. I approve o' tender feelin's, an' always did. I don't say much, fur I'm a woman o' few words, but I always knowed Rachel an' Dan'l was made ter cleave ter each other. He's innocent, too. Come! Le's go an' tackle the ineny!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### A WITNESS FOR THE PRISONER.

POLLY PARTRIDGE was a woman of energy. She boasted that she was "a woman of few words," but always talked in a fashion which suggested that, if her powers could be applied practically, the problem of perpetual motion would be solved. She could do more than talk, however; she did more on this occasion, and was ready to depart by the time she finished speaking.

"Mrs. Partridge," Beatrice suggested, "we shall have to be very careful when we reach City Hall."

"We will be so."

"And not show any sympathy for the prisoner."

"We won't show any."

"I desire you as a companion—"

"I see. You are ter be the spokesman, an' I'm glad on't. I don't want ter say a word."

"Ef I did, I should give them wretches a piece o' my mind. They deserve a hoss-whip jewridicously laid on!"

Polly flourished one arm as though to illustrate the proper way to use the whip, and her long strides compelled Miss Elberdean to make unusual haste.

They reached City Hall just as Gun-stock was concluding his speech.

"Gentlemen," he was saying, "I have only to add that a stern sense of duty existed among the old Goths. The men believed that if they were not fit for war they were fit for nothing; and if one was maimed by the loss of a leg, or an arm, or the essential part of a hand, he would kill himself outright, rather than be at once a man and a weakling. Of such stern stuff were the old-time warriors. I have no more to say!"

The prisoner sat down, and then his hearers look blankly at each other.

Of all the speeches they had ever heard, that held place at the head as a curiosity.

For two hours or more the man had stood there and talked like a race-horse. It was supposed to be a plea for himself, yet he had never touched his own case directly. He had referred to almost everything else; had given bits of modern and ancient history; had touched upon natural history, botany, points of etiquette, agricultural topics, astronomy and many other things; and while he wandered so wildly, his manner at all times had been grave and earnest.

Everybody had been impatient; many had been angry, but Williams and Merton gave him time with remarkable patience.

Everybody, too, said that it was a "crazy" speech. They could not see his object.

Was he a coward? His voice had never trembled, or his face blanched, or his gaze wavered.

Was he insane, or trying to appear insane? His speech, wandering as it had been, was coherent from the first.

He was a puzzle.

When he sat down, there was a general stir of relief. He had not made a friend by his address, and many who had been simply his enemies before were now disgusted.

"Prisoner," said Benjamin Merton, returning to the main point, "do you now confess that you are Bullion Baron?"

"No; I deny it emphatically. I am not he!"

"Mr. Dixon, we—"

"My name is not Dixon; it is Gun-stock. That, and nothing more."

Merton's patience began to waver. He made an impatient gesture.

"Why do you deny what is so well known?"

"I deny what is false. If you can make a true point, I shall be the first to admit the fact."

Lawyer Merton was surprised to see his niece come forward. For the first time she showed some emotion. There was a pink shade in her fair cheeks which told of embarrassment, yet, as there was no other sign, no one there would have suspected how much she felt the situation.

Other women had testified before her. That saved her from the vulgar curiosity of the crowd, but did not lessen her own mortification. She was deeply humiliated by the fact that she should appear in such a case, but, to spare Rachel, she would not spare herself.

She had commenced the work, and would not pause!

"Mr. Merton," she began, calmly, "may I give my testimony here?"

"Yours?"

There was surprise in Merton's voice, but he did not allow it to influence him long.

"Certainly," he added. "Pray be seated."

He placed a chair with formal politeness, and she sat down. This brought her face to face with Gun-stock, who regarded her with grave attention.

"What can you tell us, Beatrice?" the lawyer asked, kindly.

"You will remember that I was once on a stage which was robbed by Bullion Baron?"

"Yes."

"I observed the man very attentively then."

"Proceed."

"He wore a mask as usual, but a good deal was to be noticed in regard to minor particulars. I think he was rarely studied as closely as I studied him."

"I can well believe it. What was the result!"

"Simply this: I do not think the prisoner is the War-Eagle!"

Having made this assertion calmly, Miss Elberdean turned her gaze upon the prisoner without the least evidence of feeling. He was looking her full in the face.

Surprise and silence followed her statement; it was just opposite to what the spectators had expected and hoped for when she appeared. For the first time Gun-stock showed some interest; her words were the first which had been spoken in his favor. He evinced profound attention at last.

"Why do you think this?" asked Merton.

"This man's hair is not so dark as the road-agents."

"Is that all?"

"He is not so heavy, and is better formed."

The fair judge surveyed the prisoner as though he were a horse for sale under the hammer.

"Bullion Baron was noticeable for the circumference of his waist," the witness continued. "His frame was large, ill-shaped, and loose-jointed. His hands and feet were noticeably large. This man"—here her regard became more critical, and Gun-stock leaned forward over the table to catch every word—"this man is not above the medium size of men, but is very well formed, compact and muscular. He has small feet, as I noticed when I came in; and his hands are not large certainly. I should say, decidedly, that he is not Bullion Baron, though it is very likely that he is a villain."

Gun-stock's eyes had kindled as he heard himself thus analyzed as to his appearance, but his face fell perceptibly as the last words were spoken.

Mr. Merton looked doubtful.

"Recollect, niece, that the War-Eagle could change the color of his hair, and the circumference of his waist," he returned.

"Could he change the size of his hands?"

"Hardly."

"Miss Elberdean makes a good argument," observed Emory Lombard, the Commissioner of Public Improvements.

"I don't think so!"

The reply came in a cracked, querulous voice, and Jonas Hutchinson started up.

"I think the man looks like Bullion Baron in every way!" the money-lender added.

"Our friend is prejudiced," returned Lombard, smiling. "No other man in Digger's Folly has lost so much, financially, as Mr. Hutchinson. I fear that he looks at the prisoner, not through his spectacles, but through his pocketbook."

"Do you side with him?" shrilly demanded the old man, his leather-like face growing red.

"I only wish to see justice done."

"Then you will repay the money he has stolen from me, perhaps."

"Softly, friend Hutchinson," Lombard answered, smiling. "I espouse nobody's cause, but desire a full investigation."

The money-lender was angry, and his reiterated reproaches led to further discussion in which the most prominent men took part. Merton and Williams maintained a show of neutrality; Lombard put in a word, now and then, for the prisoner; while Hutchinson had for an ally Lewis Jackson, the railroad-agent.

The latter showed a bitterness equal to Hutchinson's, without any known cause.

All this pleased Miss Elberdean. While the men delayed, Tobias Partridge, she hoped, was busy. If he could secure and secrete the key of the jail, the accused would not be confined there that night. The jail was new, and it would be thought sacrilege to break down the door, or to destroy the barred windows.

Gun-stock was as silent as Beatrice; indeed, he did not seem to hear the conversation at all.

He had eyes for Beatrice, only—the first person who had spoken in his behalf.

She did not return his scrutiny, though well aware of it. It was a respectful gaze, evil though the man might be; but the lady acted as though wholly unconscious of it.

When the magnates had had their say there was a general rising from the table. Beatrice saw Tobias in the crowd, and he nodded, winked and smiled. That meant a good deal, and she tried to delay proceedings no further.

"We are wasting time here," remarked Merton. "We cannot release the accused when there is so much against him, and, if he is innocent, it is his business, not ours, to prove the fact when he is brought to trial."

The lawyer frowned as he remembered that the bound man had given them an absurd name, and refused to tell any more; Merton thought they had wasted a good deal of time upon the fellow.

"Take him to jail, sheriff!" he added.

Beatrice glanced at Gun-stock and received a glance, in return, which expressed gratitude very plainly.

"Impudent fellow!" she thought. "I wish I had the means of making him understand that it was not for him, but for another, that I spoke!"

Tobias approached her.

"It's done!" he announced.

"They key is secured, then?"

"Yes."

"Did you have any trouble in getting it?"

"Did I?" Tobias echoed. "Did I hev trouble? Great, jumpin' painters! I had the wu'st time on record!"

"What! were you detected?"

"I was!"

"When then?"

"I did my work at the revolver's muzzle!"

Miss Elberdean suddenly grew chilly.

"Great heavens! And upon whom did you draw your revolver?"

"'Twaad't my revolver; 'twas his; an' 'twan't him that was at the muzzle. 'Twas me, an' I sw'ar that the bore looked bigger nor a railroad tunnel!"

"I don't understand."

"He made me do it by p'intin' the revolver."

dead at me, the wepon glowerin' at me hijus."

"He! Who was it?"

"Don' know. Reckon he was a stranger, but I couldn't see through his mask. I stole the key while he aimed at me, an' throwed it in the creek at his command!"

#### CHAPTER V.

##### THE MYSTERY OF THE KEY.

BEATRICE was bewildered, but others crowded around her and Tobias, and she could not speak further on the subject then. According to her understanding some unknown man had turned a revolver upon her ally and compelled him to do just what he wished to do—steal the key!

But, who was it, and why had the man desired it done?

Presently there was fresh trouble. Sheriff Williams had gone to his house to get the key, and had failed to find it. His wife had been at the City Hall, and she could not explain the mystery. The key had always been kept in a certain place, but it was gone.

There was no way to open the jail.

The next half-hour was devoted to fresh searching, and to plans for getting the door open. Many means were tried, but all failed.

"We may as well give it up for to-night," Merton finally remarked.

"But, what shall we do with the prisoner?" asked the sheriff.

"I will give the use of my house, or a portion thereof. To use the City Hall would necessitate the bringing of bedding thero for the guards, if not for the prisoner. You can have my kitchen, and welcome, with abundant accommodation for your men—only, mind you, sheriff, you must take care of him. I cannot be answerable for the fellow's safe-keeping."

Williams opposed this plan at first, asserting that it would make trouble for the lawyer, but he knew that the latter's big house would make a very desirable place, and he ended by accepting the offer.

Miss Elberdean heard this with surprise; she had not expected any such good luck.

She meditated for a moment, and then, asking Polly Partridge to follow her, hurried home.

She found Rachel in their sleeping-room, absorbed in her grief. She was aroused by Beatrice's first remark.

"My dear, they are coming!"

"Who are coming?" Rachel answered.

"The sheriff and others."

"Oh! oh!—not to see me?"

"Foolish Rachel! Why do you start like a hare bound for its burrow? In a word, this house is to be turned into a jail, and the man Dixon is to be kept here to-night."

Rachel's color fluctuated like the waves of the sea.

"Oh! no! no! Why should they do that? Do they want me?"

"Have you been a road-robber?"

"No."

"Then be calm. Weak Rachel! you would never make a heroine. Come! bear in mind that your lover will be near you, a humbled captive, but a man for all of that."

"I know I shall faint when I see him!" sighed Rachel, with a shiver.

"You will not see him. Hardly! Here I've plotted treason, drawn others into my plots, and lowered my dignity vastly; and do you suppose I will let a weak girl undo all my schemes and evil deeds? Miss Merton, you shall not see this man Dixon."

Beatrice spoke with authority, but she might have saved herself trouble.

"Oh! I don't want to see him!" cried Rachel. "It would break my heart, and I know I should betray our secret. They would be a good deal severer with him if they knew I cared for him, wouldn't they?"

"I really don't think you could aid him," replied Miss Elberdean calmly, "but I am not sure that you would act as foolishly as you fear. There is more to you, Rachel, than you suspect. You kept the secret that you had a fancy for that man—kept it even from me. At the least, Rachel, you are sly; I suspect that, once stirred up, you could be deep, dangerous, wily—who knows but you could be heroic?"

Critically the queenly speaker surveyed her companion, and she appeared to be analyzing her as a naturalist would a specimen in which he had suddenly discovered new qualities; but Rachel hastened to deny that she was deep, wily or heroic.

Really, she was a sensible girl of the non-assertive kind, who had been forced by long association with one so much stronger-minded, into a state of diffident, dependent and unnatural want of confidence.

When not in a state of grief, as she had been since Gun-stock's capture, her weaknesses did not show so strongly, and everybody found her charming.

Possibly there was something in Beatrice's prophecy that a crisis might serve to bring out new qualities in the little woman. Time might yet tell.

The party with Gun-stock in charge soon arrived and took possession of the kitchen, but

neither of the girls went down. Polly Partridge soon brought word that her husband was one of the selected guards, and, at Beatrice's suggestion, an excuse was formed for him to come upstairs.

"Now," said Miss Elberdean, with a business air, "I want to know what happened concerning the key. Have we betrayed ourselves, or not?"

Tobias shook his head.

"Don't know," he replied.

"You say that the unknown compelled you to do just what you wished to do?"

"He did, that."

"Strange! Tell me all about it."

Mr. Partridge was not in the least reluctant.

"Wal, I didn't hev no trouble ter git inter the sheriff's house, fur it had been left all unguarded when his wife, like all the other women, run out like so many geese arter a worm, when the pris'ner was bringed in, an' I made fur the key, straightway.

"I knowed whar 'twas kep', an', pooty quick, my hand was ready ter grip it. Jest then a human voice sounded behint me.

"Take it down! sez the voice, sez he.

"I jumped like I was on a hot griddle, an' wheeled around. There stood a man who was masked—an' it was a mask that covered his whole head; not one o' these leetle half-moon things you sometimes see in picters—an' the critter held a revolver bearin' right onter me.

"I tell ye, my blood curdled with the skeer which got at me. I seen myself a detected thief, and my agony was awful. I thought o' my pangs o' sorrow, of Polly's disgrace, an' only blessed fortune that I had no children ter be sorry fur me. Poor children!

"But my masked man gave me but little time.

"Take it down! he sez ag'in, in a voice as clear as a bell.

"I—I don't think I want it! I faltered.

"Take down that key! sez he, in slow, awful words which loosened the j'ints in my backbone.

"Ladies, I took that key right down!"

Tobias looked wisely at Miss Elberdean, and nodded his head like an owl.

"Proceed!" was the direction. "What next?"

"Next, the critter kep' his revolver still turned on me, an' p'intaed out o' the door with his finger.

"March! sez he.

"I had no idee what the audacious wretch wanted, but thar was an eloquence in his pistol that would wax Henry Clay an' Dan'l Webster 'way out o' sight. When he said fer me ter toddle, I toddled.

"From that time I was the ship, an' that shootin'-iron was the rudder. It steered me, an' I went jest whar the masked man said.

"He driv me through the town until we come ter the creek. I should 'a' gone right on, but his voice rung out sharp an' clear.

"Halt! sez he.

"I halted.

"Throw that key in the creek!" sez he.

"Ladies, I throwed it in right spry.

"Then the man laughed a scoffin', sardonical laugh, an' I thought I could see his eyes gleam ahind his mask—sart'ainly they stared out o' the peep-holes at me like a wild animyle's.

"Now, sez he, 'I give ye five seconds ter get back ter ther village. Ef ye ain't gone when time's up, I shoot ye defunct!' sez he, with awful heartlessness of inflection. 'Scoot!' sez he.

"Ladies, I scooted. I took ter my heels an' run like a dog. Reckon I was on time, fur no shot was fired at me. That's all."

Beatrice's face was puzzled and thoughtful.

"What do you make of this?" she asked.

"Don't know!"

"Have you any suspicion who the man was?"

"No."

"Or why he wanted to get rid of the key?"

"Nary suspicion."

"Do you think he was a friend of the prisoner?"

"Can't see no other reason fur his antics."

"Did you ever see Bullion Baron?"

"Yes."

"Did this man resemble him?"

"Wal, I dunno," Tobias answered, thoughtfully. "The road-agent wears an imitation eagle on top o' his head, an' this chap hadn't no such ornament. Possibly they was about the same size, but I can't say. I ain't no reason ter think he was the War-Eagle."

Beatrice was silent. The affair perplexed her greatly. Who was the man, and why had he taken such a course? To the mystery surrounding Gun-stock was now added another, and it was equally hard to penetrate. If the unknown had been a friend of the prisoner he was one who did not dare to appear publicly.

All this was against Gun-stock. If his friends were of that caliber, what was he?

"What are you going to do, Beatrice?" asked Rachel.

"About what?"

"To rescue Dan."

Beatrice frowned. Was she doing right to meditate Gun-stock's release? Did he deserve help, when he pursued such an unsatisfactory course himself? If she aided him, would she be

working for an honest man, or for the dreaded Bullion Baron?

Beatrice was troubled.

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### GUN-STOCK'S MIND WANDERS.

"You will help him, won't you?"

Rachel detected the wavering in her cousin's mind, and the question was full of fear and pathos. Beatrice regarded her gravely.

"For your sake, child, I will go on with the work I have begun, but my mind misgives me. Why we should interfere with and frustrate the plans of those older and wiser than ourselves is a conundrum I cannot solve. We are like unruly horses that take the bit in their mouths and run away. Our elders say that the man is Bullion Baron, yet we determine to rescue him for sentimental reasons. Child, we girls are at once weak and strong-headed. I fear that no young woman is truly wise!"

"But, for Dan's sake—"

"Blind Rachel! For *your* sake, not for his! That man, Dixon, does not move me to pity in the least; I doubt him. For *your* sake, though, I will defy the laws of this august land. Now, let me scheme! If we are to liberate him, we must go down boldly and lay the train for the coming explosion. Let us plot; let us arrange our devious ways!"

Queenly Miss Elberdean pronounced these words in a manner which blended dignity, doubt, vexation, resignation and resolution.

As much as she disliked the part she was to act, she intended to act it well. Moreover, on second thought, Rachel must help.

In the mean time, Sheriff Williams and his party had taken possession of the kitchen and the dining room. There they found good quarters, and, when Nero Agrippa, the colored man-of-all-work, had been ordered to make up several couches, the guards felt that they were lucky not to be at the jail.

Gun-stock was bound to an arm-chair, and this, in turn, was bound to a stout ring which, when the house was built, had been set into a post for other purposes. This post was in a prison-like alcove.

The prisoner seemed to be secure enough.

On the whole, the guards thought that they had an easy time ahead of them. They were a picked party, and the loyalty of Mr. Merton was not to be questioned.

Tobias soon joined them, and, after awhile, Beatrice and Rachel came down. The former young lady was calm, and it was to the latter's credit that she did not appear frightened.

"We are going to make you comfortable, Mr. Williams," observed Beatrice, graciously.

"We are very comfortable now, miss," he answered.

"What! with cold food?"

"Mr. Merton has been very generous. He has retired, but has left us well provided for," and the speaker motioned to the table.

There was an abundance of food there, certainly, but Beatrice looked at it with disdain.

"You have a long night ahead of you, and should have every comfort possible. You must have a warm supper. Nero Agrippa, build a fire!"

Again Williams remonstrated, but all in vain. The fire was made. This business was just equal to Nero Agrippa's talents, and *vice versa*. The negro was stupid to an extreme, but building fires was his strong point.

The half-cooled water in the tea-kettle began to boil again.

"Now, for business!" quoth Miss Elberdean, steadily, as she pushed up her sleeves and exposed a pair of white arms, the shape of which would have made a sculptor enraptured. "The cook has retired, but I am equal to the emergency. Nero Agrippa, bring the flour! Tobias Partridge, sit at the entrance to the alcove and watch the prisoner. Sheriff, take all your men except Tobias to the dining-room. Post them where they can watch the door, but not where they will bother me!"

The fair lady's manner was one of authority, and she was obeyed by all.

There seemed to be no good reason why she should not be obeyed.

Although Williams and his men could not see the alcove, they could see all other parts of the kitchen, and the prisoner could not escape without tearing through the wall.

Besides, he was bound, and Tobias was at the entrance to the alcove.

The flour was brought, and Beatrice set to work to make a quantity of biscuits. Never did women have spectators more admiring, and never was admiration more deserved—so thought those who watched her. There was bewildering beauty in her white arms; music in the sounds of her labor; and poetry in every motion. Williams and his men gazed in mute homage, and Gun-stock had eyes only for her.

Yet, she was as indifferent as a statue.

Only Nero Agrippa and Rachel failed to be impressed. Rachel was nervous. She had something to do, and was afraid to do it—afraid of being discovered by Williams, in which case the prisoner would be worse off than ever before.

Finally she approached and entered the

## Dan Dixon's Double.

alcove. It was the first time that she had allowed herself to become visible to the prisoner, and she expected a betraying start on Gun-stock's part, but he looked at her without a change of countenance.

His firmness encouraged her.

She went to his side; she spoke in a voice which was tremulous at first, but grew stronger as she proceeded.

"Do not address me familiarly," she directed. "Do not try to put your arm around me, or even to take my hand!"

Gun-stock regarded her with a show of surprise.

"Certainly not!" he returned. "How would I dare such familiarity?"

"Control your countenance, and do not look at me lovingly," Rachel pursued.

"Not by any means."

"Don't seem to ask me for pity."

"I will not."

"Affect to be indifferent to me!"

"I will," Gun-stock agreed, and turned his gaze again upon Beatrice.

"How well he acts his part!" thought Rachel, admiringly. "Above all," she added, aloud, "do not betray any love for me!"

His gaze came back momentarily.

"Bless me! why should I?" he asked.

"You stupid fellow!" pouted Rachel, "why do you ask such a question? This man," indicating Tobias, "is our friend, as you are well aware. Speak freely!"

"I will," responded Gun-stock, gazing at Beatrice. "Arms of marvelous formation; eyes like stars, and a face which would put all the ancient beauties to shame!"

"Eh?" cried Rachel.

"Pardon me, young lady. Did you speak?"

The prisoner asked the question courteously, bringing his gaze back to Rachel.

"Poor fellow! Has trouble deranged your mind?"

"I confess that I have strange fancies!" replied the prisoner, watching Beatrice.

"Terrible!"

"To me it is a beautiful vision!"

"Oh, Tobias, his mental faculties waver!" sighed Rachel, clasping her hands in grief.

"No, young lady, there was never less of uncertainty in my mind. I have a steadfast purpose. Never before did I have so much to live for."

"How shrewd he is not to look at me, but at Beatrice!" thought Rachel. Then she added, aloud: "We have something important to say, but you must be sure to avoid treating me warmly. Act as though I were an entire stranger!"

"Yet the acquaintance seems one of years!"

Rachel brightened as Gun-stock murmured these words, but seeing that the prisoner seemed to see only Miss Elberdean, Tobias interrupted impatiently:

"No nonsense, mister!"

"Pardon the weakness of a doomed man," answered Gun-stock, withdrawing his gaze.

"Don't be a fool!" commanded Tobias.

"Your advice is good."

"The long and short on't is, Dan-i-el Dixon, we are goin' ter—"

"Pardon me, but my name is not Dan-i-el Dixon."

"Surely you are not named Bullion Baron?" cried Rachel, in dismay.

"I am not. You did not understand my reference to the man, Dixon. I judge that a fellow of that name once lived here. I am not that man. I was never in this town before to-night!"

"Oh, Dan!" murmured Rachel, reproachfully.

"Gammon!" growled Tobias, sourly.

"I most solemnly assure you that I tell the truth."

"Now you see hyar!" exclaimed Mr. Partridge, don't you act like a dunce! Can't you trust us two? Hev you any better friends in Digger's Folly than we be? Ain't we ter be relied on? Wal, I should remark! An' when we come ter you an' say that it's all right, an' that you kin speak freely, be you goin' ter git up on yer forrud legs an' kick with yer hind ones like a 'tarnal old mule?"

"Oh, Tobias!" cried Rachel, reprovingly.

"Oh, nothin'?" the ex-miner retorted. "The long an' short on't is, Mister Dan, we are goin' ter save ye ef we kin, but you don't want ter be a blockhead. Be decent, an' you go free; be stubborn, an' you go ter jail ter-morrer, as sure's yer name is Dan Dixon, by thunder!"

Gun-stock was attentive enough, at last; his great, brilliant eyes gleamed as he looked at Tobias.

"Do you really mean it?" he asked.

"Mister, do I look like a liar?"

"But you are one of my guards."

Tobias pointed to Rachel.

"Who is she?"

"A most estimable young lady, I doubt not. You kin see the plot; we'll hoodwink 'em. But the monster that menaces the law must make haste slowly. To get ye out now would be onpossible."

"Some change may occur—"

"Dan, our plan is formed a'ready."

"What is the plan?"

"A part on it is goin' on thar," and Tobias pointed to Beatrice, who was busy setting the table. "When she molded them biscuit, she molded in the sheriff's defeat."

"She molded more than that," muttered Gun-stock.

"Eh?"

"I said that your meaning was obscure."

"Spose you think she's goin' ter drug the food an' put them guards ter sleep. eh? No; that ain't it. She formed the plan, an' it's nothin' that will give us away later. Dan, you don't know what a schemer Miss Elberdean is!"

"And I shall owe my life to her—when I escape."

Tobias glanced at Rachel, and saw her face fall.

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed the ex-miner, warmly; "you deserve a cowhidin', by sin! Think Beatrice went inter this job jest 'cause she aspired ter break the laws an' statue-toots o' the land? Nary time! 'Twas the pleadin's an' tears o' one who loves ye that set the grist a-grindin'. Be you blind ter her?"

"For shame, Tobias!" quickly returned Rachel.

Partridge's finger was directed to Miss Merton, and Gun-stock gave her a courteous bow.

"I should be a brute to be indifferent under such circumstances; but you must make some allowance for a man who sees the gallows loom up before him. My mind is clearing already, and soon, believe me, I shall know all who think well of me."

"I am one, Dan!" murmured Rachel, blushing, "and we will surely save you!"

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE PHANTOM HAND ON THE GOLD.

WHEN the party in charge of Gun-stock entered Benjamin Merton's house, Jonas Hutchinson turned and walked slowly away. He had expected to go alone, but footsteps sounded by his side, and he looked around and saw Lewis Jackson, the railroad agent.

"So, Samson is caged!" Jackson remarked.

"Yes."

"Does it do you much good?"

"Indeed, it does!"

"You don't see the color of the money which Bullion Baron has stolen from you, though."

"No."

"You will never get it."

"My curse rest upon the scoundrel!"

Jackson laughed lightly.

"Strange how bitter you are, Jonas. Why, man, your soul is bound up in your money-bags! You could forgive the War-Eagle all else, but when your cash is touched, you fairly boil over with vengeful hatred!"

The old money-lender paused and turned an angry face toward his companion.

"I suppose that you think only as a patriot!" he retorted.

"Eh?"

"Do I hate yonder prisoner worse than you? Hardly! If you had your way, Lewis Jackson, you would slay him with your own hands!"

"Bah!—the law is good enough for me."

"But not quick enough. I know you well, Lewis Jackson! You always aspired to marry Rachel Merton, but you found Dan Dixon a rock in your path. I may hate the man who wronged me—I confess that I do—but you hate him because Rachel preferred him to you!"

"Your tongue flies glibly, old man!" growled Jackson.

"Do I not tell the truth?"

"What if you do?"

"Simply this: You should not jeer at me because I hate him, too."

"You think only of money; my purpose is more noble."

"Indeed! Knowing that Rachel loves young Dixon, you would bring him to death to be rid of a rival. Is that what you call noble?"

"Have a care what you say!"

"I am not afraid of you, Jackson. There is no good in you, and I am not alarmed to tell you so."

Hutchinson had lifted his tall, bent form, until, leaning upon his staff, it was nearly erect. He looked at the younger man unwaveringly.

"You are not the one to throw stones," Jackson grumbled.

"Who began it?"

"Well, well, Jonas; let it go. We are both likely to be revenged soon. Bullion Baron is in the toils, and nothing can save him. I shall lose a dangerous rival, and you will get square with the man who has stolen your money."

"But it will not bring back what I've lost!" sighed the money-lender, sadly.

"Make up by drawing all the blood out of your future creditors!"

"Why do you sneer at me, Lewis Jackson?"

"Because I know that money is your religion, and that you are a devout worshiper. Look ye, I have met Bullion Baron on the road and lost some dollars myself. 'Twas on Rolling Trail that I met the fellow. He demanded my money, but, though not armed, I refused to yield. He struck me with the butt of his revolver, and laid me senseless at his feet. When I recovered, my money was gone. For that I can forgive him,

but the man who comes between me and Rachel Merton"—the speaker paused impressively—"that man dies!"

"Well, well, we all have our idols!" murmured Hutchinson, thoughtfully.

"Mine is of flesh and blood."

"And as fickle as the wind. I know women as no man of your age does—know them to be feeble, fickle and treacherous. Man's only reliable friend is his money!"

If Jonas had been a young man making love to the object of his adoration in the flesh, he could not have put more homage and tenderness into his voice. To him money was all that was worth living for; all that saved the world from being a desert.

Jackson looked at him in silence for some time. Each man despised the other, but one common inclination made them allies; each knew that the other was unscrupulous, and ready to do any mean deed.

Jonas could have told Rachel Merton that, if she continued to be indifferent to Jackson's attempt at love-making, she was liable to get into serious trouble, but he did not care how much trouble she had.

There was nothing further to keep them in conversation, and they soon separated. Each sought his home.

Hutchinson's house was second in size only to Merton's among the habitations of Digger's Folly. It had been erected by a man with a large family. He had ill-luck; borrowed money of Jonas; felt the latter's want of mercy, and ended by seeing his home go to the miser.

Entering, Jonas secured the door behind him, and secured it well, too. He had added two stout bars to the original fastenings, and nothing except a battering-ram could force the door.

He ascended to his room, locked the door, lowered all the curtains, looked under the bed and in the closet, and then regarded the clock with a sigh.

"Eleven!" he muttered. "I shall not be able to do much to-night."

From the head of his bed he took a chisel which had been secreted there, and going to the further side of the room, selected a certain board and thrust the point of the chisel into the crack next to it.

Prying steadily, he lifted the board without trouble. Then he knelt down, ran his long arm into the space below, and successively brought out three stout canvas bags, each of which was filled until it was nearly round, and tried the strength of his single arm.

Rising, he placed the bags upon the table, set the light near them, and then opened the first. Turning it upside down he poured out a heap of coins of all sizes and values, from the insignificant penny to the goldeu, flaunting eagle.

He paused and looked at the pile with the gaze of an idolater. He thrust his fingers in and enjoyed the sight of the pile in motion. He smiled at the eagles until his withered face seemed liable to crack. He gloated over them all as a Roman mother might have done over her sons.

Eagles predominated in the mass, and nearly all was gold. The few pennies and smaller coins had nearly all been brought by him from the East, and the whole lot was the accumulation of years.

He was a veritable miser, and he followed the habit of misers of old. He had read of men who buried their money in the ground, or secreted it just as he did, who had come to grief, but these accounts never had broken him of the habit.

While the greater part of his money was invested in real estate, and a fair sum was kept in bank to throw off suspicion, he had this hoard where he could look it over every night; and, though it was bringing him in neither interest nor other return except satisfaction to his senses, he took more pleasure out of it than all the rest of his property gave him.

Every month he counted it, and the time for the work was at hand, and the task half completed.

He began it anew on this occasion.

One piece after another was handled, and changed from one pile to another. He was absorbed in the work; he neither saw nor heard anything else. He kept no watch, for he considered himself and his secret safe.

Was not the door securely locked?

He certainly had left it so, but he would have been amazed and startled if he could have seen all that was going on there.

While he counted his money the door opened, very slowly and carefully, and a face appeared in the aperture—a human face, broad and black, with big, white eyes. It was that of a negro, yet the only negro ever seen at Digger's Folly, before that night, was Nero Agrippa, and this man was not Nero.

After awhile the face disappeared, but another took its place; a face of sharp contrast; a face thin, delicate and pale.

This second person stared at Jonas as the first had done, but the miser saw not the intruder.

His eyes were with his soul, and his soul was with his money.

There was a pause, and then the door was

pushed wider open. Carefully and silently two persons entered. A big negro and a tall, pale-faced woman were Jonas Hutchinson's companions, but he was still unconscious of their proximity.

The woman moved toward him. Her garments rustled; it seemed almost impossible that he should remain unconscious of the intrusion, yet he heard nothing, saw nothing.

One by one he moved the coins.

He reached out his hand for a bright, yellow eagle, but, before he could touch it, a whiter, more slender, fairer hand moved ahead of him and was laid on the glittering pile.

He gave a gasp of terror. He gazed wildly at the hand—a woman's hand! Not yet did he realize the truth, but he thought himself haunted.

It was the ghastly hand of some woman he had wronged. Who? It was a common thing for him to take a woman's last dollar and turn her into the street, but that a phantom hand should appear, and be laid on his gold—that was new, strange, horrible.

His color faded to a yellowish white, and his eyes seemed about to start from their natural places, or to swell beyond the compass of their sockets.

Moments passed, but he could only look at the hand in agony and terror. It did not move. It hovered over his gold—the dead hand of some dead woman he had wronged in life!

It seemed to him that minutes and hours had elapsed before he broke the spell. When he succeeded in doing this he sprung to his feet excitedly, not knowing what he wished to do, or how to do it, but seeking to rid himself of the weight of horror that was upon him.

Then he had a second surprise.

A living woman and a man stood before him.

He stopped short, and his stupefied mind was not quick to take in the truth, but it dawned upon him at last.

No relief followed, however. Phantom visitors were bad enough, but living ones were worse. His gold lay exposed to their view.

The woman had drawn back her hand, and now stood erect, but he sprung between her and his money.

"Back!" he gasped, wildly. "Stand back; you shall not have it!"

A contemptuous smile swept over the woman's face.

"The old cry," she retorted. "Gold is his god, and he is willing no one else should worship."

Jonas glared around to find a weapon. He had two revolvers under his pillow, but they were not at hand; the negro was in his way. He caught up the chisel.

"Keep back, or I'll kill you!" he added, trembling with apprehension, but gifted with unnatural strength. "You shall be arrested for trying to rob me!"

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### THE REIGN OF THE REVOLVER.

FOR a moment Jonas seemed to hold the advantage, but it was soon lost. The burly negro made a quick advance, and the money-lender suddenly found himself menaced by a revolver.

"Drop it!" commanded the negro. "Drop it, or you won't be alive, to-morrow, to worship your gold!"

The weapon threw Jonas into a fresh panic.

"Thieves! Murder!"

Perhaps he intended to sound an alarm, but, really, his utterance was only a husky whisper.

"Silence!" added the negro, his eyes sparkling. "Don't dare to call out!"

"You will steal my money!"

"Perhaps we shall."

"And kill me!"

"The world would be better for the job!"

Jonas stood over his gold, his trembling hands outstretched, and his fingers outspread, as though to protect it from a hail-storm. A more miserable man it would be hard to find; if he had been at the stake, his face would not have worn an expression of greater fear and agony.

"You know us, Jonas Hutchinson?" questioned the woman, after a pause.

"I know you for fiends—robbers!"

"Peace! Lift your soul above your money, if you can."

"If you don't go away, I will call for help!"

"If you do that, you seal your own doom! We have not come here with any light motive, and, having come, we do not intend to fail tamely. Beware how you cry out, or give an alarm in any way, for it will be fatal to you."

"Look at this toy!" added the negro; and he tapped his knuckles against the big revolver.

"Dusky Dan," answered the miser, piteously, "I never did you harm—"

The negro flung out one hand toward the woman.

"You have harmed her!"

"She was proud—stiff-necked—rebellious!"

"Peace! No one shall harm, or speak ill, of my mistress, Mrs. Rosamond Grake."

"So that is her latest name. How many crimes does she commit to each alias?"

Dusky Dan started forward, seized the money-lender and rubbed the revolver forcibly against the latter's forehead.

"Peace, or you die!" he growled. Jonas was in an utter panic. He did not know whether he was to be killed or not; he knew that the original nature of Mrs. Grake was mild enough, but he had done that which might render any woman desperate; but above all considerations of personal safety arose his fears for his gold.

Not while that was in doubt could be calm.

He began to plead for mercy in a craven way.

"Will you promise to be silent?" asked Mrs. Grake.

"Yes, yes!"

"And to give attention to us?"

"Yes."

"Remove the revolver, Dan."

The negro obeyed, and Jonas breathed freer, but a red mark was left on his forehead where the revolver had been pressed.

The course of the intruders seemed to have been decided upon before, for Dan brought a chair for his mistress, and, when she sat down, he took position behind her. Jonas had sunk back into his own chair, so that he and Mrs. Grake were facing each other with the table between them, and upon the table was the money.

He had eyes only for that, and once he reached out to refill the empty bag, but the woman stopped him.

"Not yet!" she directed, with an air of authority.

Jonas fell to trembling afresh. Thus far not a coin had been touched by them, but he feared the worst.

He had good reasons to suspect that they would not go away and leave his treasure; and he began to consider how he could defeat and bring them to grief.

No measure would have been severe enough to trouble his conscience, and he would have killed them if he could, but how could he do anything when the muscular negro and the revolver were opposed to him?

"Now," said Mrs. Grake, "let us have an understanding. It was my misfortune to know you, Jonas Hutchinson, a generation ago, and your fiendish enmity has ruined my life."

"I was not always your enemy."

"No, but thank Heaven, I read your nature even when you professed to be my friend."

"Do you think you would have fared worse if you had become my wife?" suddenly, fiercely demanded the old man.

"I do—I say without hesitation that I do. You have been the evil genius of my life, but I have never fallen to that pitch of degradation which would have been the lot of your wife: of a man whose whole soul was bound up in his money, and who lived like a beggar when he might have lived like a lord."

The man was rising above the miser temporarily, and Jonas's eyes glittered with hatred, but he caught sight of Dusky Dan's face, and checked the retort which was upon his lips.

There was a frown upon the negro's face, and that in his eyes which taught Jonas caution. He remained silent.

"My memory goes back over twenty-five years," continued Mrs. Grake, thoughtfully. "I was then a girl of eighteen; you were a man of forty-five or more. Heaven knows why you took a fancy to me, but it was none of Heaven's work."

"You made love to me, and would not be discouraged when I told you plainly that I did not like you. Wherever I went you followed, hunting me like a shadow, until I came to hate you. Even that did not drive you away, and you became the vexation of my life."

"In time I met some one for whom I did care—Mordaunt Randolph. He was more suited to me in years than you, and I liked him from the first."

"I was much in his company, but there was always a shadow on our pleasure. When we wandered around the woods and fields that surrounded my native village, I frequently saw your face lifted above a rock, or protruding beyond a bush, and your eyes watching us with nervous hatred."

"This sight would give a terrible shock, but it was long before I would explain to Mr. Randolph what startled me. I did explain at last, and you know what followed."

"He spoke to you; ordered you to keep away from us; you answered with abuse; and then, when you called him evil names, he felled you at his feet with a blow!"

Jonas Hutchinson's face flushed to a purple hue.

"Curse him!" he hissed, "but the dog paid dearly for it!"

Dusky Dan clicked his revolver suggestively, and the money-lender shrunk back in his chair.

Mrs. Grake seemed impervious to all that the man might say; she remained calm and continued:

"Such was the first chapter in the tragedy. The second soon came. I married Mordaunt Randolph. He had ten thousand dollars, and bought the finest residence in the town, and put the remainder of his money into business."

"We expected to prosper, for all things indicated success; but, after the first year, all went

wrong. We met with losses; ventures which seemed to be perfectly safe were the means of decreasing our resources, and we found ourselves ruined at the end of the second year."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

It was a gleeful, exultant laugh from Jonas, but once more Dusky Dan clicked his revolver, and again the miser shrunk back in the air.

Mrs. Grake showed more feeling as she went on, but it was of a nature which troubled Jonas.

"When, at last, we saw the sheriff's flag float over our home, and knew that we were penniless, we learned that you had been the cause of all our misfortunes. Patiently, mercilessly you had worked, opposing and defeating my husband's every plan, and keeping yourself out of sight so shrewdly that your work was not suspected and, consequently, could not be met."

"Was there no regret in your mind, then?" croaked the miser, "that you had cast me off?"

"Regret!" the woman echoed. "I was never so glad as then, for I knew, at last, just what a fiend incarnate you were!"

The contempt and loathing in her voice stirred Jonas up again, but the flush of his anger reached the first stage, only; the click of Dusky Dan's revolver kept him under.

"Your hatred did not end there," Mrs. Grake resumed, "but it is not of later years that I design to speak. Suffice it to say that you have given other proofs of your evil nature; that my husband went down to his grave in poverty because you ruined us. I believe that, instead of a childless widow, I should to-day be the mistress of a happy home were it not for you."

Jonas rubbed his hands together in glee.

"Would you not have done better to marry rich old Hutchinson?" he asked, croaking.

"Marry him! I would as soon marry a rattlesnake or a tiger. The one is not more relentless; the other is not more loathsome!"

The miser's eyes glittered again, but Mrs. Grake suddenly leaned forward and added:

"When you first brought us to bankruptcy, you practically robbed us of ten thousand dollars. I have come to get that amount, with interest!"

Jonas turned pale.

"What?" he gasped.

"You have before you a pile of gold—many thousand dollars. I demand that you give me as much as you robbed me of, a score of years ago!"

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### THE MISERY OF A MISER.

JONAS ceased to exult over his triumphs of by-gone years. All his fears returned, and they were stronger than ever. He saw the glittering gold in front of him, and, stricken with the apprehension that he was to lose it all, the inspiration started out freely on his ashen face.

"Mercy!" he gasped.

"What mercy did you show me?" Mrs. Grake asked, sternly.

"But that was so long ago—and I have repented!"

"Fool! do you remember that you exulted in your crimes, not ten minutes ago?"

"I—I beg your pardon—"

"I will not allow you to ask it. Let us confine ourselves to business. You owe me ten thousand dollars, with interest—"

"I do not owe you a penny."

"Dan, show him the proof!"

The big negro thrust forward the revolver and, with the muzzle bearing upon Jonas, clicked it in the old way.

"This is the promissory note!" he uttered, in a deep, significant voice.

"Yonder weapon," added Mrs. Grake, "is my proof, my attorney and my collector. I demand ten thousand dollars, with interest!"

"This is robbery!" moaned the miser.

"Then robbery, for once, is justice. Call it what you will. I am aware that the law would hold it as you say, and I do not seek to avoid the stigma. I only say that I have determined to repay you for the many fiendish acts you have done in the past."

"Kill me, if you will, but spare me my money!" Jonas groaned.

"Spare it for whom? Who are your heirs?"

"I have none."

"What good would your money do you, if you were dead?"

"Oh! that I could take it with me!"

"Heart of mocking, delusive brass!" Mrs. Grake exclaimed, with contempt. "However, let us keep to business. Call it robbery or what you will, I am going to have the money I demand. You are said to be worth half a million. How much have you in that pile?"

"A few, a very few hundreds!"

"Empty the other two bags!"

"No, no! I—"

The old man reached out and clasped his withered hands around the bags, but Dusky Dan rapped his knuckles sharply with the revolver, causing him to leap to his feet and howl with pain.

Before he had recovered, the negro had neatly emptied both bags.

The sight of the scattered gold put Jonas into fresh misery, but he was helpless. Dan held the revolver close to his breast, while Mrs. Grake thoughtfully handled the coins.

"Nearly all of gold," she murmured, "but even one thousand dollars would make a bulky and heavy package. Not the thing to carry in one's pocket, except in unusual cases. We shall have to take one of the bags along. I don't see how we are to get the desired sum into it, but I suppose I can get along without full interest."

Sue selected one of the bags, and counted out one hundred eagles.

Jonas watched in dismay, his face convulsed, and his body actually writhing as a wounded snake might writhe.

The ready revolver kept him still, however, until she dropped the eagles into the bag. Then he uttered a deep groan and stretched out his hands.

"No, no!" he implored.

"What now?"

"Kill me, or spare me my money!"

"We would not stain our hands with such base blood."

"Leave me my money, and I will pay you all you claim. I will give you real estate—lands, houses, anything you say—but don't rob me!"

"Jonas, your mind is growing weak!"

"Eh?"

"You took my money just when you had the chance, I shall follow your example. I am not fool enough to lose the chance I have, while as for your promise—oh! fool, fool! do you think I would believe you, even under oath?"

Jonas was almost maddened, and he kept up his abject pleas, but all in vain. Mrs. Grake kept up her work, and dropped coin after coin into the bag until it was nearly full of the yellow collection.

The sight almost maddened Jonas.

Death itself would not have given him such bitter anguish.

At last Mrs. Grake came upon a roll of banknotes which had heretofore been overlooked, and these were eagerly seized upon. The problem of how she was to get the desired sum into the bag was solved.

Twenty thousand dollars she had thus gathered, a part in gold and a part in paper money. There was enough of the former to make a good-sized package, and one unwieldy for whoever might carry it.

Once more Jonas made a plea, but it was disregarded.

She tied up the treasure-bag.

"I have not been careful as to the amount, and reckoned interest minutely," she observed, "for there is no way to do it. I don't pretend to know just how much you robbed us of, a score of years ago. I am satisfied with twenty thousand dollars, and the sum is there."

"I shall go mad!" cried Jonas, beating his breast.

"The very best thing you can do."

"You have beggared me."

"How about your houses and lands? 'Tis said that you are worth half a million."

"Lies!—all lies!"

"Have that as you will; I only wish I could take every dollar you have. You need not look to me for mercy. I have the money, and I shall keep it."

She arose and adjusted a cloak which she wore. It had a hood-like attachment, and this she drew up in place. When she had dropped a veil over her face, she might have defied recognition at the hands of her closest acquaintance.

Seeing the folly of pleading, Jonas adopted a new line of conduct.

"Do you live in the village?" he asked.

"Why?"

"I should like to see you again."

Mrs. Grake smiled sarcastically.

"No doubt; but you will not be accommodated. When I go out you will see your gold disappear forever, and you may as well search for Solomon's wealth as for me. If I ever come again, it will be when you expect me least, and my coming will mean greater trouble to you than now."

She had moved toward the door, but Dusky Dan lingered.

She now nodded to the negro, who clicked his revolver and addressed Jonas in a deep voice:

"We go now, demon! See this revolver! It is large and in excellent condition. Six cartridges hide in the six chambers of the cylinder. They are hungry for food, and their food is human life. They long to cut open the air, rush to the yielding flesh, rend it, eat their fill. Of such appetite are these slugs. Beware of them! Demon, when we go out you are to remain here ten minutes. You cannot harm us if you do pursue, for our plans are laid and the hour is late; but it will be fatal folly if you pursue or molest us. I will unloose the hungry cartridges; I will shoot you dead!"

Pronouncing these words in a manner in keeping with what he said, Dan waved the revolver before Hutchinson's eyes.

The latter saw that the hammer was raised, and, in a panic, promised not to interfere with their departure.

The negro followed his mistress to the door, and then both passed out quietly. A clicking

sound followed, showing that the door was locked—though how they had secured a key to enter, or to relock the door, Jonas did not know.

He remained gazing blankly at the place where he had seen them last.

For the time being he thought more of his life than anything else, and he did not dare to stir for several minutes. Then, as it seemed as if time had been given them to retreat, a full realization of his loss broke upon him. Uttering a cry of anguish he flung his arms around the gold that remained, and, bending his head over it as if it were an idol, dropped tears of grief upon the yellow coins.

"Ruined! ruined!" he moaned, in pitiable misery.

He sobbed like a child, but something soon occurred to bring him up from his position. A voice sounded gravely, solemnly in the room, and it pronounced his name:

"Jonas Hutchinson!"

He started up, aware that he was no longer alone, but tears filled his eyes and obscured his vision.

"Jonas Hutchinson!"

He cleared his eyes and looked toward the door. What he saw startled him anew. His late visitors had not returned, as he thought, but some one—or something—else was there.

Standing by the door was a figure as immovable as the walls; the figure of a man who differed not from ordinary men, in appearance, except that his face was unnaturally pale, and his expression strange and far-away.

But to the money-lender it was a fresh alarm. He recoiled; he stared in terror; his face became almost as white as the visitor's.

Years before he had seen that man lying dead, and had himself heaped earth upon his breast when he had been put in his grave. Now, had the man come from the land beyond the "dark river" of the future?

"Do you know me?" asked the intruder, in a slow, sepulchral monotone.

"You are Mordaunt Randolph!" gasped Jonas.

"I was Mordaunt Randolph; now I am a phantom come from another land to visit you. I am come to tell you that the hour of your death is near!"

Jonas could not answer.

"My blood was once on your hands; my death is now upon your soul. Beware! beware! You must answer for all this before the sun has two score times performed his diurnal journey. Death hovers near you; he grins at your shoulder; his hand is raised to grip you by the throat!"

The speaker stretched out his own hand, and Jonas, utterly unnerved by the succession of horrors, uttered a cry and sprung to one side as though he expected, indeed, to find Death by his side.

He saw nothing, but the unguarded movement caused him to step into the cavity left by the board he had removed from the floor, and not replaced. He found himself going down, and that added to his terror. He uttered a cry, and, when he touched the floor, lay perfectly still.

Utterly overcome, he had fainted.

When he recovered, he was alone. The lamp burned steadily on the table, but it showed no intruder. The gold lay untouched. Jonas hastened to the door; it was locked, as Mordaunt Randolph's wife had left it.

For some time the money-lender was in a panic, believing that he had seen a real phantom, but his more practical nature soon asserted itself.

"Bah! it was no ghost, but Randolph in the flesh. Somehow, he escaped the death I doomed him to, and his coming here to-night was a part of the same plot which brought the woman here!"

He tried to feel as confident as was his assertion, but was by no means fully successful. Reasonable as his explanation was, he did not feel satisfied.

"I saw his body," the villain muttered, "handled it, felt for signs of life, and then buried it with my own hands. If the bullet had not done its work, the grave would. How can he be alive? He is not!"

Then his opinion wavered again, and the explanation he had found before, received a measure of credence.

He would have banished it forever had he known that the widow of Mordaunt Randolph—otherwise Mrs. Grake—and Dusky Dan had come there alone. They believed, as much as Hutchinson did, that Randolph had long been with the dead.

And, phantom or living man, they had not seen him that night, or for years previously.

When he recovered his nerve somewhat, Jonas replaced the money in the two remaining bags, uttering many dismal moans as he did so, and then put them back where they belonged and adjusted the board.

Not until he had done this did he try to leave the room. Then he tried the door and unlocked it without trouble. The key used by his despoilers was not to be seen.

All the intruders had vanished. Jonas found a broken window on the lower floor and secured

it. After that night he intended to have his solitary servant sleep within sound of his voice.

At last, utterly exhausted, the miser went to bed, groaned for awhile, and then fell asleep.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE PRISONER'S LAST CHANCE.

GUN-STOCK could not be accused of indifference any longer. He was young, and life is sweet to those of his years. If the weight of three generations had been on his shoulders, and the soul-wearying cross of manifold bodily afflictions had been his, he might have welcomed even a road-agent's fate; but not in the morning sun of his career.

He looked steadily at Rachel and Tobias, and ignored Beatrice, who had finished setting the table and, having gone to the window, was looking out with her back to the prisoner.

She could not have been more indifferent to him if he had been a clod.

"Such a friend as you," remarked Gun-stock, looking gravely at Rachel's blushes, "would put new life in a man half-executed."

"Now you talk sense, Dan!" commented Tobias.

"I have not changed since the old days, Daniel," Rachel added.

"Mercy blooms forever in the female breast!" quoth Gun-stock, with ponderous gravity.

Rachel bent her fair head low.

"And love, too, Daniel!" she whispered.

The prisoner glanced at statue-like Beatrice.

"Would that I could have a proof!" he murmured.

"A proof?"

"Ay! Consider my situation, worthy lady. Suppose that I think highly of a certain young lady, and that I must make a strong effort to save myself from the death to which misguided men would doom me. Which would I naturally prefer?—to see her like a figure of ice"—he glanced at Beatrice—"or ready to give me a friendly, encouraging word?"

"Daniel, dear Daniel! haven't I said that word? Can I say more? Do you doubt me?"

"Fair lady, I could not do that. Your worth, your varied excellencies of mind and heart all appear and appeal to my understanding; and I could swear that there breathes not a more estimable woman; but much of mystery, of doubt, of gloom and of uncertainty hems me in as the river is bound by its banks. Fire needs no warming, but what can melt stone?"

Again he looked toward Beatrice.

"His mind surely wanders!" Rachel whispered.

"Mad as a March hare!" declared Tobias.

"What can we do?"

"Dunno!"

"If he could only have a doctor!"

"You're his best doctor."

Gun-stock turned his gaze upon them again.

"You spoke of a plot by which I might escape," he observed, coherently.

"Can yer understand it, pard?"

"Is it intricate?"

"Not so very."

"I think," the prisoner gravely answered, "that you may venture to unfold it gradually!"

"Wal, you shall hear it as Beatrice planned it, but, mind ye, 'twas all on account o' Rachel. Neither Beatrice nor me would raise a hand ter help a man accused o' sech heen'us crimes."

Tobias did not place much faith in Gun-stock's mental aberration, and blamed him for acting so indifferently toward Rachel.

Friend though he had been to Dan Dixon in the days gone by, he could not help taking this shot, but the prisoner bowed with such grave humility that the ex-miner's heart softened.

"Wal, it's jest like this, Dan. See that big wood-box over yender?"

"Yes."

"That's ter be yer bed, or, at least, yer bed will be made on it. Now, we shall bring it in hyar an' set it down, an' you will settle down like a bug in a rug, but thar will be mischief in yer mind. You'll pretend ter go ter sleep, an' then yer guards, of course, will foller suit."

"Arter a bit, Dan, you'll crawl out o' the bed-clothes over the back o' the box, jest as soft as a mouse would. Now, you see that squar' piece o' carpetin' on ther floor. Eh? Good! Wal, under it thar is a trap-door, and under the trap is stairs which go ter the suller."

"Once in the suller you kin git out o' the window, an' then git a move on ye an' skip."

"But what will the sheriff an' his gang be doing while I'm rattling around all over the premises?"

"Ef you do any rattlin', I'll pound yer all blue!"

"Pardon me, worthy sir; I will be as careful as you could wish; but let me understand the details of this combination fully."

Tobias explained. The sheriff and his men were weary, and would be glad to sleep when they had a chance. As Gun-stock was bound, and there was no visible outlet from the alcove, it would seem that no extra watchfulness was needed.

The prisoner had only to slip slowly, carefully and quietly out of his bunk, get over the back side of the box, raise the trap-door, descend to

the cellar and then crawl out through the cellar window.

"Simple as A B C," Gun-stock grimly agreed. "Remove about a score of 'ifs,' and there's no room to doubt its success."

Fortunately for his devoted head, he spoke the last words in a subdued voice.

"Now, Daniel," resumed Rachel, "didn't you tell me once that you had never been through Little Turkey Pass?"

"Very likely; for I never was there."

"Then you must have a guide."

"Yes?"

"Certainly, or you would be lost. Nero Agrippa shall guide you."

"The name is enough to send cold chills up and down a fellow's spine, but our dusky friend does not look dangerous."

"Nero is honest, devoted and simple-minded. Indeed, at times he is so weak mentally as to be useless; but he has a sensible spell on now, and he certainly knows Little Turkey Pass well."

"Ay, ay!"

Gun-stock answered absently; the supper was ready, and Beatrice was aiding Nero Agrippa to carry the various dishes to the dining-room. The prisoner seemed to find interest in her graceful movements.

"A better guide yer couldn't hev," declared Tobias.

"I believe you."

"Honesty runs riot in that thar head."

"A noble—a regal head!" Gun-stock agreed.

"Full o' endurance, too."

"Yet so delicate to look at!"

"Not old, neitther."

"No, no; young and beautiful."

"Tobias, poor Dan's mind wanders again!" sighed Rachel, with deep pity.

"Pardon me," requested the culprit; "I spoke with a double meaning, or no meaning—call it as you will. Of course, Nero Agrippa is not delicate or beautiful."

"Sca'cely!" Tobias agreed, grimly.

"Have no fear for me; your kindness has raised my spirits. My mind no longer wavers, and I see many things very clearly. Above all, I bless the kind Providence that has sent such good friends in my hour of need."

Gravely he gave one of his bound hands to both Tobias and Rachel, and the latter brightened up wonderfully when she received a warm pressure. Surely, Dan's mind was growing clearer, and she had less to fear.

She was showing courage and dissimulation which amazed her, and it was good to know that Dan appreciated it.

The table in the dining-room was set, and the sheriff and his men fell to with zeal. Rarely had they received such incentive to like destruction—they had captured Bullion Baron, and regal Beatrice Elberdean had made the biscuits with her own fair hands. Marvelous food for stomach and reason.

They ate, they drank, they laughed, jested and told stories; they were in great good humor.

When they were through they were ready to sleep, and their beds were ready for them. Nero Agrippa and Tobias had been busy, and an abundance of blankets had been placed on boards which were laid upon boxes at a proper elevation. The wood-box had been moved to the alcove, and a bed made there for the prisoner.

Tobias ate lightly, but he claimed to be very sleepy. All the men were sleepy, including Sheriff Williams, so the latter decided that they should go to bed at once.

He looked to the prisoner's bonds and found them secure. He did not see any possible chance for him to escape, and it was not known that the notorious War-Eagle had any ally.

What need was there of compelling any of the guards to keep awake all night?

The question was asked, and the decision rendered that it would be a waste of time. Gun-stock was put to bed—some of the men grumbled at the idea of giving him a couch fit for a Christian, but there was no real opposition—and then the guards retired also.

Beatrice, Rachel and Nero Agrippa had already disappeared.

Silence was soon the order of events in the kitchen. It did not take the men long to fall asleep. They breathed a sigh of relief; they meditated on their triumph; their minds wandered; they slept.

In a room on the upper floor Beatrice and Rachel waited in utter darkness; they dared not show a light. The latter was timid and nervous; the former was thoughtful.

Beatrice had grave doubts. Was she doing well to contrive the escape of a man who had been pronounced Bullion Baron? There was no proof that the charge was false. The heart of a girl said, "My lover is innocent!" and it had over-weighted the minds of grave, honest men.

"The day may come," thought Beatrice, "when I shall dearly repent this, but, for Rachel's sake, that man, Dixon, must be saved!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### GUN-STOCK'S GUIDE.

"COME!"

Miss Elberdean uttered the direction as the

tiny clock in the room struck twice in a weak, apologetic way, and she arose as she spoke.

"Oh! Beatrice, do you think he has made his escape?" asked Rachel, in a flutter.

"That is what we must learn."

"Perhaps Nero Agrippa is not at hand."

"Nero Agrippa is to be trusted as far as his wits go. I confess that I have some doubts. He was confused to-night, and I am not sure he will prove equal to the demands of the occasion."

"What—what shall we do if he fails us?"

Beatrice arrived at a conclusion. Rachel was nervous, and it would be reckless for her to try to leave the room in her present condition. Hence, Beatrice pronounced the edict that Rachel should remain where she was, and, after a little opposition, the latter yielded.

Miss Elberdean went out alone, silently, carefully, successfully.

The night was fitful and uncertain. Clouds skurried ostentatiously across the sky. There was no moon as yet, but if the clouds would descend to keep out of the way, the stars would make the night fine.

Almost as soon as she reached the west side of the house she saw two men, and nearer approach discovered them to be Nero Agrippa and Gun-stock. No sooner did the latter recognize Beatrice than he advanced to meet her.

"Madame," he exclaimed, gratefully, "I owe my life to you!"

"You owe me nothing; all we have done has been due to Rachel. Remember that!" the lady added, with severity.

"But you planned the escape."

"The wind moves yonder clouds, but it is the clouds that cover the sky."

"At least, you will allow me to thank you gratefully."

"I will carry your thanks to Rachel."

"As you will," Gun-stock returned, with an air of annoyance. "I am free, as you see. The knife you furnished me was sharp, and I cut my wrists as well as my bonds."

He held up the injured members, but she did not deign to glance at them. Instead, she turned to the negro.

"Are the horses ready?" she asked.

"Yes'm," Nero Agrippa replied.

"You are to guide this man, Dixon, along the devious ways of Little Turkey Pass."

"To Sledge-wood?"

"Nonsense! I did not say along Rolling Trail, but by way of Little Turkey Pass."

"Dat's ober dar," answered the negro, pointing.

"Where else should it be?"

"Don' know as I kin find de way."

"Why not?"

"Nebber was ober dar, missus."

"Nonsense! You know every foot of the way."

"Don' reck'leek as I war ebber dar. Nebber war much o' a trav'ler, nohow. S'pose we git los' in der mountain?"

Nero Agrippa's manner was stupid and uncertain, and Beatrice found her worst fears realized. Never intelligent, there were times when the negro was wholly useless, and incapable of doing an errand even in the village. He was in his worst mood now, and she knew perfectly well that he was not fit to act as guide. Both he and Gun-stock would be lost in the labyrinth around Little Turkey Pass.

Some other guide must be found.

Who could be secured?

Tobias Partridge was just the man, but he was out of the question. Being one of the guards, it would be little less than suicide to ask him to put his head in the noose for an alleged outlaw's sake.

Beatrice dared not trust any one else.

Deep was her annoyance—so deep that she felt she could with satisfaction see Nero Agrippa chastised—but an unpleasant conviction was forced upon her. She had promised Rachel that her lover should be conducted safely beyond the bewildering gulches of the mountain, and the only way to do this was to be the guide, herself.

Dismayed at the mere idea, she questioned the negro further, but he became more and more unintelligible. It would be folly to rely upon him; unless she made the journey Gun-stock would be in the hands of his foes again before another night.

Curly she ordered the servant to bring her own horse, and he managed to do it in a blundering way. While he worked she kept away from Gun-stock, but when the three horses were standing in a group, she had to show her hand.

Pointing to one, she tersely addressed Gun-stock:

"Mount!"

He silently, gravely obeyed.

A motion caused Nero Agrippa to clamber into the second saddle.

Then she gracefully gained the third.

"Follow me," she ordered, tightening the rein.

"Pardon me," interrupted Gun-stock, hurriedly, "but I do not understand—"

"I am going to guide you."

"But I am told that the pass is wild, difficult—perhaps dangerous."

"What of it?"

"I cannot allow you to make such a sacrifice for me—"

"For you!" she echoed, with cold hauteur.

"Do not flatter yourself, sir. I have no desire or inclination to make any sacrifice for you. Whatever I do is done for Rachel's sake, and you may thank your guardian angel—if it has not long since deserted you—that Rachel believes in you. I can't say that I do. I have doubts, sir, and I want you to know it!"

"It is your privilege, madam," he responded, humbly; "but why should you put yourself in peril?"

"For Rachel's sake."

"But I am not worthy of it—"

"I believe you!"

"Nor can I allow it."

"Be silent! I will not hear any more idle talk from you, for the matter is irrevocably fixed; I shall guide you to the open mountain. Speak no further, but follow me. We are to ride in single file. Nero Agrippa, follow me; the man, Dixon, must follow you, and these relative positions are to be kept."

There was nothing harsh, vixenish, or coarse in Miss Elberdean's manner, but it was full of settled determination, and Gun-stock felt that he might as well rebel against the successive order of night and day.

Silently and meekly he took the allotted place, and the strange procession moved away toward the north. Gun-stock's rein lay loosely in his grasp; he hardly knew whether he was riding or walking. Looking ahead, he could see, now and then, a graceful figure swaying in the saddle, but the views were transient. Big, fat, unwieldy Nero Agrippa intervened like an eclipse of the darkest kind, and the sun of womanly beauty was obscured.

Gun-stock felt a strong desire to slay the man of deep color, or otherwise remove him forcibly.

The eclipse worried him.

Beatrice led the way with outward composure, though not at ease in reality. Little Turkey Pass was not much traveled, but it might prove far from safe. Other men of lawless nature than Bullion Baron were heard of, now and then, around Digger's Folly, and they were liable to be met.

She and the negro each had a revolver, but they might not prove sufficient protection.

She crossed Shoglock Brook and the adjoining plain, and entered the Pass. It was not a pleasant place, but luck favored her in one respect. The clouds skurried away and the stars shone brightly, while the moon rose like a conqueror in the far distance.

The result was that, high as the walls of the Pass were in most places, the defile was never totally dark, and, in places, was pleasant enough.

For a mile they went in utter silence; then Gun-stock boldly passed Nero Agrippa and rode to the side of the fair guide.

"May I ask you a question?" he inquired, gravely.

"If it is important."

"If I should capture the real Bullion Baron, would my innocence be proven?"

"Probably."

"Would you regard it so?"

"Not being a legal person, I have no opinion."

"I think that I shall attempt his capture."

"My advice is that when you get beyond the Pass you shake the dust of Montana from your feet."

"And leave a clouded name behind me?"

"Better that than to leave your bones."

"It matters but little where disgraced bones lie, but slandered bones should have justice. The name of Gun-stock never was clouded before."

"You ought to know best."

"Your great kindness is duly appreciated, and, after you have done so much for me—"

"I have done all for Rachel, and nothing for you!" Beatrice curtly amended.

"Yet, I shall never forget your noble work. You have saved my life, and I shall always look back with grateful recollection and pleasure to the time when first I saw you."

"You saw me first when you were a prisoner at City Hall, accused of being Bullion Baron. If that situation was so agreeable, I regret that we released you."

"Will you not allow me to express my gratitude?"

"Not to me!"

"To whom, then?"

"Rachel."

"Always 'Rachel!'" the ex-prisoner exclaimed, impatiently.

Beatrice turned upon him indignantly.

"Sir, your indifference, to-night, toward the woman who loves you is brutal! I believe all that has been said against you. You are probably Bullion Baron; if you are not, you are, in any case, a man not worth the saving!"

"Madam, why do you speak so severely? I admire you; I would give a year of my life for your good opinion. What can I do to gain it? Short as has been our acquaintance I admire you—"

Beatrice raised her whip significantly.

"Do you remember the night, only a few weeks ago, when you asked Rachel to marry you?"

"I?"

"You, Daniel Dixon!"

"My name is not Dixon, but Gun-stock—"

"Enough! I will not listen to you further. Attempt to force your conversation on me again and I will turn back and leave you, at once. Not a word of reply; I will not hear it. No one but a hardened wretch would try to show gallantry at such a time, and utter nonsensical compliments. For awhile, Daniel Dixon, I will spare Rachel knowledge of your brutal indifference, but, if you ever return to her, you will have to reform radically. Now, return to your position at the end of the line, and do not venture to address me again!"

She touched her horse as she ceased speaking and galloped ahead.

Gun-stock did not try to follow.

He fell back to the rear, and the Nero Agrippa eclipse was as nothing compared to the eclipse of his mind.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE WOMAN BY SHOGLOCK BROOK.

LITTLE TURKEY PASS ended in a confused way at a point where Nature seemed uncertain what to do next, but had ended by making a rocky area which was nearly level, and where no one need lose his way.

Mis Elberdean stopped her horse at this dividing line and allowed Gun-stock to join her. He made no effort to do so in haste, and his expression was stern, it seemed to her.

"Here we leave you," she announced.

"Do you return the way you came?"

"Yes."

"Will it be safe?"

"Quite."

"The passages are very bewildering."

"To a stranger—yes; but I have been over the ground often, and know the way well. As for you, you have only to ride straight ahead. Follow the trail, which is well defined, and you cannot go wrong. Rapid riding is now possible, and you ought to make a good many miles before the hour when your enemies will get under way. After that, all depends on yourself. The horse you ride was captured with you, so I presume you know his points, good and bad."

"He is both strong and swift."

"Then you ought to escape."

She gathered up the rein to depart.

"To-night," observed Gun-stock, in a calm, steady voice, "I have been the recipient of favors which I shall never forget. I am grateful, and I tender thanks to each and all who have helped me. My situation was precarious. I had a single hope and a double fear. One fear was of the lynchers, and, to gain time, I made a long, rambling speech at City Hall. The other fear was that I should unjustly be condemned in court. What the hope was I need not state, at this time."

He paused, meditated, and resumed:

"I think the day will come when I can walk freely in the streets of Digger's Folly. I am not Bullion Baron, and have no knowledge of that ruffian. I hope he will be brought to justice and unmasked."

Again he stopped. Then he looked at Beatrice, as though he expected her to say something, but she only bowed.

"When that time comes," added Gun-stock, firmly, "I intend to see each person whom I have seen to-night. Those who have placed faith in me it shall be shown that they made no mistake; those who thought evil of me shall confess their error."

"If you can make them."

"The wise man changes his mind; the fool, never."

"Some men change too often," she answered, pointedly.

"Perhaps they change less often than they are thought to change."

"We talk in riddles. Have you any message to send back to Digger's Folly?"

"Say, if you please, to Miss Merton that Daniel Dixon duly appreciates all that has been done for him; that he realizes the value of the kind heart that first worked for him; and that I hope she may always find as good a friend in her hour of trouble as I found to-night."

"Is that all?"

"What more is necessary?"

"Would you leave her in doubt as to whether she will ever see you again?"

"She will see me again."

"You have done as well as I expected—even better. But, one word to you, Daniel Dixon. You know how you sought Rachel's company, won her love and her promise to marry you. To some men such things are trivial matters; to Rachel, her love is all the world. The man who would break her heart would be a dastard, indeed."

"I do not believe Daniel Dixon is such a man."

Beatrice looked at him doubtfully. Even then he did not speak directly to the point, and her dissatisfaction was unbounded.

The moonlight fell upon his face fairly. She

noticed his fine form and fine face, his broad, high forehead; his clear, bold eyes and his strong, decided face. It was not the aspect, as a whole, of a man who was ignoble, treacherous or vacillating, but she was still in doubt.

The man was a puzzle.

"We are wasting valuable time here," she said, after a pause. "It behooves you to flee while you can; it is necessary that I get back before your escape is discovered."

"Will not your share in this be discovered, anyhow?"

"I think not. Only one horse is from our stable, and it is Nero Agrippa who cares for that. Having Rachel's future happiness in mind I have been careful to arrange matters so that nothing will be traced to her."

"I hope all will be well with you both."

"Thanks," she replied, calmly. "Now I will leave you. Good-night!"

She bowed coldly and turned her horse as she spoke, but there was deep earnestness in Gun-stock's reply:

"Good-by, and God bless you!"

Beatrice did not vouchsafe him another glance, and she led the way along the return trail at a gallop until the dangerous rocks compelled her to pause or put her horse in jeopardy. Nero Agrippa came up clinging to the pommel of his saddle in alarm.

"Fore de Lord! we-'uns will break our necks!" he lamented.

She made no reply, and the negro soon found another subject of remark.

"Missus, dot Gum-stake is a-stannin' whar we lef' him on his hoss, an' his arms is folded across his lungs, an' he's a-lookin' arter we-'uns powerful hard, like as though he war feelin' right smart bad!"

"Nero Agrippa, be silent!" commanded Beatrice, with severity.

"I's deaf an' dumb, an' can't talk, missus."

Miss Elberdean was deeply annoyed to learn that "the man, Dixon," should dare to look after her, but, when the trail took a curve in a place of utter darkness, she yielded to temptation like Lot's wife and looked back, herself, secretly.

Far in the distance, bathed in moonlight as she was in darkness, odious Gun-stock still sat and gazed. She blessed the night which surely hid her from his view, and, a moment later, passed on to where even she could not have gained another view if she had wished.

She was an undesirable companion on the way home. Twice Nero Agrippa addressed her, whereupon she "nearly bit his head off," as he afterward stated.

Poor Beatrice was in ill-humor.

For Rachel's sake she had gone ahead unwaveringly, but, now that it was done, grave doubts assailed her. Dixon was accused of being Bullion Baron, and his accusers were the wisest and best men of Digger's Folly. In favor of the theory of his innocence there was nothing but the romantic confidence of a young woman who loved him—Rachel.

Beatrice lacked the "faith" which is so strong an element of the ordinary woman. Said ordinary woman believes that her lover and her friends are perfect; that all wrongs will ultimately come right; and that a dozen other things will occur which seem likely never to occur, really; and her only reason for so believing is because she "knows it is so," logic to the contrary, notwithstanding. But Beatrice was not like other women, and she realized that the chances were she had given aid to Bullion Baron.

Scores of conflicting emotions disturbed her mind, and it was not strange that she frightened the negro with harp speech.

They neared Digger's Folly, at last.

Riding down toward Shoglock Brook they essayed to cross the ford, as usual, but both horses suddenly rebelled, showed signs of alarm and backed away from the water.

Beatrice had raised her whip, but she suddenly paused. In all her acquaintance with her horse she had never known him to act thus before—there might be good reason for it.

She looked down and saw a human form on the sand, while an exclamation from Nero Agrippa, at the same time, showed that he had made a similar discovery.

"Dismount, and see what the trouble is!" ordered Miss Elberdean.

The negro obeyed, and then sent up a surprised cry:

"It's a woman!"

"A woman! Who?"

"Don' know her."

Beatrice quickly joined him. She found the prostrate person to be without active signs of life, but both pulse and heart were beating faintly. The young lady did not recognize her.

"Bring water!" she directed, and then carefully lifted the unknown's head into her lap.

The motion brought forth distinct words:

"Take care of the bag of gold!"

"What's dat?" asked Nero Agrippa, quickly.

"She only mutters in delirium."

"Has Delirium got de gold?"

"Don't be stupid; I mean that her mind wanders, and she is unconscious of what she says. On the whole, I see no reason why we should use

water, now. She has not fainted, as I thought, but is ill with fever, or—"

She hesitated, and the unknown woman incoherently muttered:

"Strap the bag of gold to your saddle."

"Is this the vagary of a disordered mind, or has she good cause to speak as she does?"

Beatrice unconsciously spoke aloud, and the negro practically answered:

"I ain't informed on dat ar' p'int."

"She is a stranger, but a suffering woman; we must take her to the house."

Again the speaker stopped short. To take the unknown to Merton's would be to betray the fact that she had been out. This would not do.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### AFTER THE ESCAPE.

BEATRICE glanced toward the east. Already, she thought, she could discern signs of the advance of the sun of another day. This might be fancy, but it remained a fact that night was fast wearing away.

Whatever was done must be done quickly.

Not for a moment did she think of deserting the unconscious woman. Stranger she might be in Digger's Folly, and undoubtedly was; but she had a claim upon Beatrice such as one suffering woman should have upon another all over the world.

She must be moved to shelter, but how, and where?

It was possible, the girl thought, to get her into Benjamin Merton's house quietly, but all indications went to prove that she would have to be given the services of a doctor. This surely meant publicity and explanation which must be false at the start, and might lead to suspicions.

Merton's was out of the question.

Like an inspiration came recollection of Polly Partridge. That good woman was a person of many abilities; she was not only a good nurse, but, despite her loquacity, could keep silent on any one point when necessary, and was as faithful as could be wished.

That thought settled it—to Polly's the unknown must go.

She was raised by the negro with care and skill not to be expected—there was no doubt in regard to his strength—and placed upon one of the horses. When Nero Agrippa had mounted, also, he held her in what Beatrice saw was a satisfactory manner.

This produced a series of disconnected mutterings:

"Look out for the bag of gold!" "Get to a place of safety before we are pursued!" "Keep your revolver ready for use!" "The darkness makes me shiver!"

Beatrice sighed.

"The world is full of trouble!" she murmured. "This one has a soul-cankering secret; that one has a persecuting enemy; another one is borne down with bodily ills. What one of us is truly happy? Verily, misery encompasses us all, and trouble attacks like a skulking assassin with ready dagger!"

Nero Agrippa was ready to move on with his burden, so they crossed Shoglock Brook and went to the town. Polly Partridge's little house was dark and silent, but a knock on the window aroused her.

When she knew who was there she quickly opened the door, and a very few words of explanation caused her to declare that her whole house was at the stranger's disposal.

The latter was brought in and laid on the bed, after which Beatrice gave two directions to Nero Agrippa very carefully. First, he was to return the horses to their proper places and, as far as possible, remove all signs of the recent journey; secondly, he was to remain as silent as the grave in regard to all that had been done that night.

He promised with his usual docility, but, as she watched him ride away, Beatrice felt that she was relying upon a brittle reed.

The man meant well, but his mind was weak.

Returning to the cabin, she assisted Mrs. Partridge to care for the stranger. Her sympathy grew stronger at once. The woman's face was refined, pale and melancholy; it appealed to her strongly. It was the face of one above the middle classes, and the face of one who had seen great trouble in her day.

They spoke to her, but she gave no attention. Without opening her eyes she muttered in the same random way, often referring to the real or imaginary "bag of gold." They could make nothing of these disconnected sentences, but, even in her semi-delirium, the shadow of trouble was upon her.

They removed her clothing and made her as comfortable as possible.

A clew to her name was gained while thus occupied. Several of the plain, cheap, but neat garments were found marked, "R. D. Grake."

Who R. D. Grake was they did not know.

Morning was close at hand, and they decided to defer calling a doctor until then. Polly was zealous in her desire to help her guest, and a

plausible explanation of her presence there was soon arrived at.

Beatrice's share in the case must be kept secret, and a fictitious account given.

"I'm a woman o' few words!" declared Polly, putting her arms akimbo and tipping her head over in juxtaposition with her left shoulder, "but when one o' my own sect is a-sufferin', I kin beat the false apostles for treachery an' falsehood. The only thing I regret is that our lie ain't stronger! Anyhow, I hereby adopt this afflicted angel fur my sister."

"I cannot imagine who she is, or how she came to be lying by Shoglock Brook," Beatrice returned.

"She may hav wandered over through Rolling Trail?"

"Her shoes do not indicate it."

"I reckon she'll hav a brain-fever."

"I cannot rid myself of the belief that she is suffering from a severe blow on the head."

"Look out for the bag of gold!" muttered the sick woman, turning her head restlessly.

"Strange!" Beatrice murmured.

"Bring along the horses, Dan!" added the patient.

"I see mystery an' crime in this!" proclaimed Polly, sagely. "She's been robbed of a bag o' gold, an' struck down by an assassin hand!"

"Possibly you are right."

Miss Elberdean was deeply interested, but she could not remain longer. Leaving the Partridge residence she returned to Merton's. She regained the house without trouble, and found Rachel sleeping in her chair. Without awaking her, the heroine of the night's adventures retired and was soon asleep.

An hour later there was a stir in the house. Beatrice awoke to find Rachel standing in the middle of the room with clasped hands and startled eyes, while, in the lower part of the house, loud voices and hurried steps sounded.

"Oh! Beatrice, they have discovered his escape!" exclaimed Rachel.

"So I see," was the calm reply.

"They will come here to search!"

"Do you suppose they will think that you have imitated the woman of history and concealed him in your heart? Nonsense! The man would be hopelessly lost there, he is so little when regarded as a man!"

"Oh! why do you wander so at this crisis?"

"Crisis?" repeated Miss Elberdean, raising her brows in surprise. "Imaginative Rachel! I see no crisis."

"But we must see the men, even if they don't suspect us."

"Cannot you carry a bold face?"

"Beatrice, I am sure I can't!"

"But you were as wily and deceitful, and as bold and heroic, last night, as one could wish."

"Ah! but he was in danger, then."

"I comprehend. All this you could be for the man Dixon, but not for Rachel. Well, well, let me show you a way out. You think that you will tremble, pale, shrink and show alarm, despite all your efforts to be heroic. Good! Hide not one quaver, priceless Rachel, but merely add to such pantomimic evidence an occasional deceitful little feminine exclamation in a shrewd *tremolo*, and such words as these: 'Oh! oh! He will return and murder us!' 'We are now at his mercy!' 'He will seek terrible revenge!' Thus, charming Rachel, you will account for your fits and starts."

The noise below increased; doors banged and, outside, men were heard to indulge in language not in keeping with Scriptural injunctions.

After awhile a knock sounded at the door.

They opened it and saw Mr. Merton.

"Thank Heaven you are safe, my children!" he exclaimed, with a sigh of relief.

"And pray, Uncle Benjamin, why shouldn't we be safe?" asked Beatrice, calmly.

"Bullion Baron has escaped!"

"Escaped!"

"Yes."

"And what were his guards doing?"

"Sleeping. He was left securely bound, and, as they thought, unarmed, but it seems he had a knife secreted about his garments. He cut his bonds, slid out of his bunk, arranged the bed-clothes so that a human form still seemed to be under them, descended through the trap-door and escaped."

"Have the guards been arrested?"

"Certainly not. Why should they be?"

"For allowing the wretch to escape!"

"But the sheriff, himself, was one of the guards."

"Then he should be arrested, also. Nothing can excuse these men for letting that horrible creature loose to prey upon our innocent community!"

"He will re-re-return and sla-a-ay us all!" stammered Rachel, true to directions.

Her father hastened to reassure her, and then went out. The girls soon descended to the lower floor. Rachel would have avoided the trial, but strong-minded Beatrice would not permit it, and among the reasons given, later, for deplored the War-Eagle's escape, was the alleged fact that "Merton's girl" was so alarmed lest he should return and injure them that she was totally unnerved.

Truly, Beatrice had planned well.

There was traveling, hither and yon, and careful searching for trails, and investigations galore, but Bullion Baron was not found.

If any one looked in Little Turkey Pass for the trail, Beatrice did not hear of it. Everybody not in the secret took it for granted that the runaway had gone by way of Rolling Trail, as that was where he had always been seen, and there was a general rush in that direction.

When night again fell the searchers returned. They came alone.

Bullion Baron had not been found, and, what was still better, no one suspected the share the two girls had taken in the events of the night.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### POLLY GROWS SUSPICIOUS.

FIVE days passed without bringing any important change in the situation, as far as was known to the members of Benjamin Merton's family.

Certainly, Bullion Baron had neither been captured nor seen. The latter fact was not surprising, for he had always been erratic as a road-worker. Small game he usually ignored, but, striking with what was either remarkable foresight or a suspicious knowledge of existing facts, he alighted at just the right moment and, seldom appearing, always secured a rich harvest when he did stop unlucky travelers.

This fact seemed to make appropriate his chosen name—"Bullion Baron." The whole combination, including "The War-Eagle of Danger Divide," had been signed to a grim receipt which he gave to his first victim.

Sheriff Williams was deeply chagrined by his prisoner's escape, and he had searched long and patiently, but the man appeared to have vanished into his retreat and adopted the plan of remaining there.

In the village, and elsewhere, placards were to be seen offering a reward for "the capture of Dan Dixon, alias 'Bullion Baron,' the notorious outlaw."

Not a whisper indicated it was suspected that the escaped prisoner had received aid.

The little house of the Partridges had been turned into a hospital, and the unknown woman lay there fighting a battle with brain fever. The doctor had announced that her trouble was due to a blow received from some object which had given her a serious shock without even abrading the skin.

This added to the mystery, and gave the impression that she had been the victim of a murderous assault. Her name had been given out as R. D. Grake, on the strength of the marked clothing, but no one appeared to identify her, and it could not be learned how she had come to Digger's Folly.

Day after day she lay unconscious, muttering a good deal, and saying various strange things, but never anything intelligible.

The burden of her speech was in regard to "a bag of gold"—something that was rarely long left unferred to when she muttered at all.

Her case was not regarded as serious, if she had quiet and good care, and the latter she certainly was receiving from Polly Partridge's hands. That excellent woman was doing herself great credit, and Tobias smoked his pipe, and explained to all that, although he had retired from business, he did not object to having his wife make herself useful.

Beatrice did not desert her *protegee*. Polly's little fiction had sent out the story that she had found the injured woman, so no one mentioned Miss Elberdean in connection with the affair, and as she was noted for her benevolence, her devotion to R. D. Grake provoked no comment.

On the fifth day Mrs. Partridge had a visitor whose coming surprised her considerably. It was Jonas Hutchinson. This person had not been seen abroad for several days, and it was said that he was ill.

Polly cared nothing for the rumor, for she hated the man cordially, but when he made his appearance, she was more interested. She would not have asked him in, but he entered uninvited.

"Fine day, ma'am," he observed politely.

"Yes."

"Lovely day!"

"It don't cost me nor you anything," Polly pointedly replied.

"You look weary, ma'am."

"Do I?"

"Yes; you must have been working hard. I hear that you have a patient."

"That's so."

"Have you learned who she is?"

"No."

"Is she dangerously ill?"

"No."

Polly was brief and ungracious in her answers, but the money-lender did not evince any resentment.

"Was there nothing in her possession, except the clothes marked 'R. D. Grake,' to show who she was?"

"Not a thing."

"Is she rich?"

"I ain't asked her."

"I thought perhaps she had valuables about her—money or jewels?"

"She hadn't a jewel or a dollar o' money."

"Ah!"

Jonas rubbed his chin and looked thoughtfully at vacancy. He had been studying Mrs. Partridge's face as far as was possible without betraying himself, but without any great result.

"You found her by Shoglock Brook, I believe," he resumed.

"Yes."

"How did you happen to be out?"

"I went fur air."

"At the last hours of night?"

"Yes."

Polly's brief replies were growing sharp, for the man vexed her, but he now put in a question which was even worse.

"Isn't that a strange time to go out for a walk?" he pointedly asked.

"Ain't I a right ter go when I see fit?"

"Yes, but you were never known to go at such an hour before. There is a general impression, Mrs. Partridge, that there is more to the case than appears in the account—in brief, that the account is not true."

Jonas had read in Polly's sharp answers the fact that he could not get any information by the means he had been employing. He now tried a new plan, and looked carefully to see the result. He had hoped to discover signs of guilt and confusion, but saw only anger.

Her eyes flashed ominously.

"I'm a woman o' few words!" she declared with emphasis, "but I'd like ter face the person who accuses ME o' lyin'! I'll hav you understand, Mr. Pinch-dollar Hutchinson, that my veracity is above approbrium an' mendacity. The word o' Polly Partridge is as good as her laundry-work, and both is spotless. Men may come an' men may go, but truth flourishes in my chaplock o' flowers like a knight-errand's armor. Yes, siree, Jonas! Now show me the man who says Polly Partridge is a liar!"

The estimable speaker was at the flood-tide of indignation, and she did not stand like a statue while delivering her oration.

She swung her arms about as though they were flails to thrash grain, and she was anxious to make Jonas the aforesaid grain.

He remained unterrified, however.

"You avoid the point, woman!" he answered.

"What d'ye mean?"

"Like most folks who are cornered, you try to wander from the subject."

"Cornered! Me cornered! See hyar, Jonas Hutchinson, ef you wa'n't sech an insignificant critter, I'd show ye whar the corner is."

"Abate your violence, Polly. We need not wrangle like rival churches; let us be friends. The point is that there is more about your patient than the public knows."

"What on't?"

"I am curious."

"Busybodies always be."

"It is not reasonable," persisted Jonas, "that you rose at two or three o'clock in the morning, walked through the village and over to Shoglock Brook, and found this patient."

"What do you care about it, anyhow?"

"I'm curious."

He might have said that he was more than curious. Quiet as he had been, he had heard the accounts of the sick woman that had gone abroad, and he did not doubt that "R. D. Grake" was one of the night visitors who had brought him to grief.

This supposed fact left him in a quandary.

What had happened to Mrs. Grake? Where was Dusky Dan, the negro? Where was the bag of gold?

Jonas had suffered bitter anguish since meeting with his loss, but, for reasons of his own, he dared not take steps to have the robbers arrested. Now, he could account for the situation only by inferring that Dusky Dan had turned traitor to his accomplice, felled her by the brook with a murderous blow, taken the bag of gold and fled.

He had called with the hope that the mutterings of the woman had revealed the facts, and that he might learn them; and, also, to ascertain if she had betrayed anything in regard to the past; but he was destined to arrive at the belief that the most he had done was to get himself into trouble.

"Jonas, what be you pryn' inter the matter for?" demanded Polly, with emphasis.

"Prying?"

"Yes."

"I do not pry into anybody's affairs, but every public-spirited man ought to take an interest."

"Must be yer pocketbook is te'ched!"

"Madam?"

"Oh! I know you, Jonas; you don't keer a cent fur anybody but yerself. I'm a woman o' few words, but I tell ye I see something peculiar in this. I hope yer conscience is easy, Jonas!"

Mrs. Partridge was fairly underway, and she proceeded to discourse with volubility and force. She alarmed the money-lender thoroughly. He had thought that he could make a few inquiries and not arouse suspicions, but his own imprudence and Polly's hatred of him had brought him into trouble.

When she had talked herself out of breath he improved the chance to get away. Smoothing

the matter over as far as he could, he beat a rather precipitate retreat.

Polly looked after him suspiciously.

"I mistrust that man!" she declared.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### THE WAR-EAGLE OF THE DIVIDE.

TEN minutes later Beatrice Elberdean arrived at the Partridge house. She was not long in perceiving that something was wrong.

"Is your patient worse, Polly?" she asked.

"No; she's doin' wal," Polly replied.

"Then what is it that troubles you?"

"I've had a caller."

"Who?"

"Jonas Hutchinson."

"What did he want?"

"Ef you kin tell, I'd like ter hev you. I must say it's mortal mysterious!"

"Explain!"

Mrs. Partridge was in a fever to do so, and she poured out the story with her usual volubility. Her memory was good, and she succeeded in bringing out the various puzzling points very nearly in Jonas's own language.

"Now, what's he drivin' at?" she added.

"You are suspicious of him, I see."

"Suspicious! Wal, I should *ree-mark!* I know Jonas, an' you know him. He ain't the man ter be interested in anything more than his money, an' never did a neighborly or public thing, unless he thought it would help him an' his pocket. Them's a correct sizin' up o' the facts. Now, what's he drivin' at?"

"Can it be that he knows of Mrs. Grake?"

"That's the question. Furdermore, was it him which hit her over the head? She speaks of a bag o' gold. Did she hev one, an' did he rob her on't, an' leave her fur dead by Shoglock Brook?"

"You are taking a radical view of the case now, Polly. The man is not one in whom I have confidence, and it is possible that he might do a lawless act under provocation; but that he is a highway robber is not probable—unless he is Bullion Baron!"

"Eh?" cried Polly.

"Didn't you understand?"

"I did, that; an' you put an idee inter my head. Why shouldn't Jonas be Bullion Baron? He's mean enough, an' he's got a heap o' money. Miss Elberdean, that idee o' yourn is vallerble!"

"I do not believe in it."

"What proof is that that 'tain't true?"

"As much as that it is true."

"Somebody is Bullion Baron, an' I know it ain't Dan Dixon. That boy is as innocent as I be, I yum!"

"You cannot convince Digger's Folly of that."

"They're stupid. You an' me, though, know Dan better—poor lamb!"

"Exclude me when you glorify that man, Dixon!" answered Beatrice, severely.

"You speak harshly."

"I helped him under a stress of circumstances, but not for his own sake. I know you are his friend, but I am not. The fellow may be honest enough, but, if I were on a jury, I would find a 'true bill' against him as being Bullion Baron. At the least, he is impudent and offensive. But let us drop him. What about Jonas?"

They conversed for some time, and Beatrice did not oppose the theory that the money-lender had called with some secret object.

His whole record was against the claim that he had called with an ordinary or worthy motive.

Still, they were not able to surmise what his motive had been, and the talk amounted to nothing. Polly advanced the theory that her patient might be in danger from the aged schemer, and announced that she should watch over the sick woman more closely than ever to protect her from harm, and Miss Elberdean did not oppose the precautionary measure.

Beatrice remained at the house several hours, and was pleased to see some signs of improvement in Mrs. Grake's condition. The fever must run its course, but it was encouraging to observe that the patient was doing so well.

She promised to meet the crisis with an amount of strength not to have been expected from one so delicate naturally.

It was twilight when Beatrice walked home. Two hours later there was a sensation at Digger's Folly. Rachel came to Beatrice with pale face and startled eyes—sure indications of mental panic. She sank into a chair, speechless with emotion.

"My dear, what is it?" Miss Elberdean asked.

"Oh! Beatrice, the stage has been attacked again by Bullion Baron!"

"To-day?"

"Yes."

"Your father was expected to be a passenger. Has he come?"

"He has not reached the house, and, oh! Beatrice, I haven't courage enough to go out and see if he has come at all. I am afraid to hear the news! What if—"

She hesitated, burst into tears, and sunk into a chair. Beatrice arose, put her arm around her cousin's waist, and soothingly replied:

"Be calm. If there is still news to be learned, better hear it now than a month hence!"

When the stage entered Rolling Trail—this was the regular stage-road, which followed a succession of easy hills and hollows through a gulch from Harvest Lead—there were four passengers that day.

One was an Eastern capitalist looking for a chance to invest; the second was a woman who lived at Harvest Lead; the third was a child, and the fourth, and most important of all, was Benjamin Merton, attorney-at-law.

Unknown to them some one was awaiting their arrival two miles west of Digger's Folly. As the twilight shadows began to gather, this watcher rode out of a cross-gulch and allowed his horse to stand in the deeper shadow of a high wall of rock.

The rider was masked, even to his hands; and the cover for his head was no toy such as is seen in Eastern cities. It covered his face from neck to hair, both sides of his head, and half of the back—in brief, it was a complete disguise.

Above the mask was another strange contrivance. It was an imitation eagle, carefully made of some material the nature of which was not easily discerned, but in the coloring it would have been seen, had any one had chance to look closely, its fidelity to the marking of a genuine eagle was remarkable. In its rampant position, and its half-spread wings, it closely resembled the eagles seen upon United States' coins, but its head was pointed directly to the front.

That eagle would have told the whole story to any resident of the town of Danger Divide.

Bullion Baron was on the trail.

After a while there was a rumble to the west. The lone watcher turned his head and peered through the now deeper darkness. The stage was coming.

It reached a point opposite him, and he suddenly rode out of cover and pointed a revolver at the man on the box.

"Halt!" he ordered.

The driver heard. He saw, too; he recognized the War-Eagle, and his horses were checked promptly.

"I am Bullion Baron, tax-collector of Danger Divide!" pursued the masked rider, in a calm, clear, matter-of-fact voice. "I will trouble every one here to pass over his, or her, valuables. After that you can all go on. If you resist, I shall kill you all!"

He ceased speaking, and then a revolver suddenly flashed inside the stage. The bullet passed close to the War-Eagle's head.

Hardly had this been done before his horse dashed forward, almost as if operated by his own mind rather than the command of his master, and a few bounds took him to the side of the vehicle.

The shot had been fired by Merton, and his courage was still good. He waited until the outlaw was almost at hand, and then pulled trigger again.

In a moment more the revolver was dashed from his hand, and Bullion Baron was leaning over him. The situation was reversed, and he was covered with a revolver.

"Easy, Benjamin!" directed the War-Eagle, coolly. "While I am a man of peace I can rise up and be as ugly as any one. Don't tempt me further, or I may have to 'wing' you!"

The warning was sufficient. Twice had Merton fired without effect, and now he was unarmed. He hesitated to incur the road agent's anger by useless resistance, for he had no desire to receive a disabling wound of the sort for which the man was noted.

"I yield," he reluctantly answered.

"Good! Pass over your valuables, all of you!"

Merton and the woman obeyed, but the man from the East objected. The revolver, sharply pressed against his head, overcame his stubborn mood, and he added to the fund. His share was a gold watch and a hundred odd dollars in money, but little was obtained from the other passengers.

"I didn't expect much," carelessly observed the outlaw, "and I only came out to show you, Merton, that I am not to be frightened."

"So I see."

The lawyer was looking sharply at the road-agent, trying to recognize him positively. The voice did not sound like Dan Dixon's, but it would be easy to change that.

"I have just as good right in Danger Divide as anybody else, and I'm going to stay here."

"Perhaps you think you have a right to this gentleman's watch and money, but you would find it hard to convince him."

"Excuse me; these articles are *mine*, not his."

"I see that you ride the same horse you had when we captured you."

"Are you sure?"

"I am, and there is no longer a doubt that Bullion Baron and Dan Dixon are one!"

#### CHAPTER XVI.

##### BEATRICE DETECTS DANGER.

THE road-agent laughed lightly.

"You are losing your strong legal mind, Benjamin," he observed. "You jump to conclusions madly. Suspicion is not proof."

"It is just as good in this case."

"It is nothing of the kind."

"Do you deny that you were a prisoner at Digger's Folly a week ago?"

"Now you ask too much," Bullion Baron returned, with another laugh. "Being a lawyer, you know well how to question a witness and draw out his secrets like a human corkscrew, but I decline to be used that way."

"Deny all you see fit," returned Merton, "but you cannot convince me. When Dan Dixon was arrested we were at once impressed by the fact that he had a horse exactly like yours. I see the same horse now under you."

"Remember that it is dark."

"There is light enough for me."

"Well, Merton, let us skip trivial matters. I wish to say that you may as well give up the plan of catching the War-Eagle of the Divide. I did not go into this business blindly, but only after careful consideration. The result is that I have things so well arranged that I can afford to laugh at you all."

"Laugh if you will, but we'll have you yet!"

"In which case I hope to be imprisoned in your own house!" and the road-agent laughed again until the mimic eagle on his head danced merrily.

The mood of the outlaw was quite new to Rolling Trail and its travelers, for he had never before been known to indulge in the least levity, but he may have had good reasons for mirth.

Merton was stung by the allusion.

"It was no weakness of mine that let you free, for I washed my hands out of the whole job and retired to bed. Let me ask you one question, however."

"Well?"

"How did you escape?"

"Don't you know?"

"I know the common story."

"What more do you want?"

"The impression has been growing in my mind that you must have had help. The sheriff says he searched for a weapon and found none, yet you had a knife with which you cut your bonds and escaped. Where did that knife come from?"

"I'll leave you to surmise."

"My surmise is that there was a traitor in the sheriff's party. The men were picked carefully, we thought, but no man is above suspicion. You may have had help right in my own house!"

Little did the lawyer suspect how close he was getting to the facts, but his vague suspicions were confirmed by Bullion Baron's manner.

No reply was made for some time. The road-agent's head was lowered, and he seemed to have gone off into a period of meditation. That it was guilt, Merton felt positive.

"I have one point on you, War-Eagle!" he added, triumphantly.

"Give an item of proof, if you can."

"Frankly, I cannot; I have my suspicion only, and it is based upon the fact that you managed to escape as you did. I have been arriving slowly at the conclusion that you had aid; now, I am sure of it."

"Well, Merton, you are reckless in your guesses. I have not yet admitted that I was ever a prisoner in your hands; I do not admit it now. In any case, talk will do no good; Bullion Baron is not to be captured. He will ride this road as long as he sees fit, and all of Digger's Folly cannot nab him!"

"Time will tell."

"I'll make a wager with you."

"Thanks, but I decline."

"All right, but I claim the right to surprise you some time. Now, you can go your way. This visit was merely to let you see that I am still on the Trail. You cannot frighten me away. Drive on!"

The last words were addressed to the man on the box. That person was very willing to go, and Merton did not object. Armed as the War-Eagle was, he had them in his power, and resistance would have been folly.

The stage moved on, Bullion Baron waved a farewell and turned away, and the passengers saw him no more.

The Eastern capitalist had been given time to get over his indignation, and was taking his loss philosophically as a feature of the wild West which could not be avoided; but he was anxious to ask a good many questions. He did not find Merton a sociable companion; the lawyer was in a mood deeply thoughtful, and the theories that were in his mind were far more important to him than his fellow-traveler's curiosity.

When the town was reached they sent a new thrill through the people by telling of the adventure, and the people were thrown into great excitement by the knowledge that Bullion Baron was still at work.

It was some time later when Merton sought his own house. He was hungry, and gave attention to the waiting table at once, while Beatrice and Rachel were unusually attentive.

They kept close to him while he ate, though Rachel was careful to be where he could not see her face.

"I suppose you've heard the news?" he questioned, after he had somewhat satisfied his hunger.

"You have met Bullion Baron again," replied Miss Elberdean, calmly.

"Yes."

"You seem none the worse for it."

"I am not."

"How about the War-Eagle?"

"Oh! he had his usual good luck."

"Any new discoveries?"

Beatrice asked the question carelessly, but Rachel leaned forward in painful anxiety to hear the answer.

"One occurs to me right here," Merton remarked, smiling. "You commented on Bullion Baron's hands, at the City Hall hearing, and, to-night, for the first time in his history as a road-agent, the fellow wore gloves!"

"He has heard of my comments."

"Reconstruct your sentence, and say that he heard your comments—not heard of them—and you will be nearer the truth, I think. Secondly, Bullion Baron rode the same horse we captured with that fellow, Gun-stock."

Rachel felt a peculiar chill.

"Did he refer to his imprisonment?" asked Miss Elberdean, calmly.

"I referred to it."

"Did he admit his identity?"

"He would neither admit nor deny it. But, Beatrice," Merton added, gravely, "I think that I've made a serious discovery. The scoundrel had help when he escaped from here!"

Rachel grew very pale, and even Beatrice felt her composure shaken. It was only with a strong effort that she controlled her countenance, and that she did so at all was very much to her credit—Merton was looking directly at her.

"Indeed! is that possible?" she returned.

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"He betrayed the fact."

Beatrice's eyes flashed with anger. She naturally rushed to the conclusion that the faithless ex-prisoner had made known what she and Rachel had done. She had never thought well of Gun-stock, and, now, she felt that it would be a delight to see him sent to prison for life.

Fortunately, the lawyer had again lowered his gaze, and, after a brief struggle, she managed to speak very calmly.

"What did the ruffian say?"

"Nothing definite. You see, I had been studying on his escape, and had come to the conclusion that he *must* have had aid, so, to-night, I charged him with it. He laughed heartily, but would neither admit nor deny it. Of course, he would not betray his accomplice."

Rachel drew a sigh of relief.

"Who, then," continued Beatrice, "do you think was his accomplice?"

"Oh! one of the guards."

"What one?"

"If you can surmise I'll give you a diamond ring, niece. I haven't the slightest idea."

"No wonder. Your guards were men to be trusted in all ways, I feel sure. You do wrong to suspect them."

"I have just mentioned my suspicions to Jackson and others, and they are inclined to agree with me."

Beatrice heard this with alarm. Her uncle had put a certain theory before the public, and she knew how theories were prone to grow, gather strength, take shape—worst of all, to lead to suspicion.

Would the future turn an accusing finger toward her and Rachel?

She was now surprised to hear Miss Merton ask a question in a very commonplace way.

"Father, you have seen Bullion Baron and had a chance to study him carefully. Did his voice sound like that of your late prisoner?"

"No; I cannot say that it did. I used all my skill, but I could not make the fellow seem like the same man. However, his form was, of course, disguised, and he would be mad to betray himself by his voice. He disguised it well, but, of course, he's the same scamp who called himself Gun-stock."

So thought Beatrice, but Rachel had never been more opposed to the idea.

She had been startled by the way in which her father had put some of his statements, but, now they were explained, her faith in Dan Dixon was as strong as ever.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### RACHEL HAS CAUSE FOR ALARM.

THIRTY-SIX hours passed without any new sensation. Beatrice had about convinced Merton that his theory was incorrect. She had gone over the members of the sheriff's guard, one by one, and called attention to the fact that each enjoyed an excellent reputation at Digger's Folly; and to this she had added the statement that he was placing her and all his family in a painful position by advancing such a probability.

If the prisoner had received help there it reflected upon all the family, and she, for one, would not care to go out and meet the vulgar curiosity of the people, as expressed in prolonged stares.

This seemed over-fastidiousness to Merton, but

he had long since given up trying to reconcile feminine peculiarities and logic.

He allowed his theory to drop, as far as he was concerned himself, but others did not. The idea was under way, and nearly every person was discussing it.

Proof was soon at hand to show that the lawyer's chance words had borne fruit of a disagreeable kind.

On the second morning after Merton's last adventure with the road-agent, Rachel went to walk. Often, since that memorable night, she had cast a longing glance toward Little Turkey Pass. There had never been anything there to interest her, formerly, but since Gun-stock had traveled through the defile it was quite a different matter.

She did not confess her object to Beatrice, or, indeed, mention to the latter that she was going. Her cousin had walked over to Partridge's some time before, and Rachel embraced the opportunity and slipped away quietly.

She soon reached Shoglock Brook and crossed on the foot-bridge.

Beyond, there was a level plain comprising several acres, and dotted with stray bushes and thickets. Beyond this was the southern end of the Pass.

She wandered along until the latter point was reached. It was not one of pleasant aspect. She saw black rocks with a narrow road winding between them until its tortuous course evaded the eye. Rachel looked in curiosity. Along this little-traveled course Gun-lock had gone. Perhaps his trail was still visible. She stooped and searched, but in vain; the hard, stone-covered soil that had baffled the sheriff was not inclined to give up its secrets to her.

She finally arose with a sigh.

"No luck?" questioned a quiet voice near her. She turned quickly, and then looked annoyed. Lewis Jackson was there.

"Have you taken to trailing?" added the railroad agent, with a smile.

"Trailing!" faltered Rachel.

"Yes."

"Why do you ask such an absurd question?"

"Then you are *not* trailing?"

"Certainly not."

"I beg your pardon; I thought you might be looking for signs of Dan Dixon's flight."

Rachel felt her color change, but her courage surprised even herself. She knew that Jackson had a strong liking for her, and that he hated Dan as much as she hated the railroad agent. She rallied to meet the danger.

"Possibly the men of Digger's Folly would do well to give the work of finding the road-agent to the women!" she retorted.

"Possibly the women *could* tell something about him," was the pointed response.

"Certainly the men cannot."

"But hiders can find, 'tis said."

"You talk in riddles."

"It ought not to be a riddle to those who were concerned in Dixon's escape."

"Perhaps you were one."

"Perhaps I was not. Is your memory so short, Miss Merton, that you do not remember your allies of that occasion?"

"Sir!"

"In brief, Rachel, I know as well as you do how Dixon escaped. It was your work, and he went through Little Turkey Pass!"

Jackson still smiled, but it was a disagreeable smile. There was triumph in it, and try as he might, he could not hide the fact that he spoke in hostility.

Rachel began to suspect what was coming, but the very force of the danger made her the stronger to meet it.

"You are absurd!" she answered.

"I claim that you liberated Dixon, and sent him through the Pass by a guide—or, perhaps, you were that guide?"

The last words were doubtfully spoken, and he studied her face closely; but Rachel experienced relief. Whatever he might suspect, he did not know the truth.

"Perhaps you will give your proof," she retorted.

"With pleasure. You always had a fancy for Dixon. He came here as an entire stranger, and called himself a prospector for gold, but nobody ever knew him to prospect. Suspicion soon grew against the man, and he was disliked—by all save you!"

"You are impudent, Lewis Jackson, but I will hear you out. Go on."

"You allowed the fellow to make love to you, but were very careful not to tell of it at home. To this very day your father is ignorant of the deplorable fact. So, too, he does not suspect that it was you who wrested Dixon, *alias* Bullion Baron, out of the hands of law in his own house."

"Mr. Jackson, you seem equally at home with falsehood and with cowardly insults, but I feel that you are below my anger or my contempt. You talk at random."

"Deny it if you will, but you must deal with the subject, and with me!"

"Must!"

"Must!"

"How dare you say that? Do you know—"

"I simply know that, if you turn a scornful

shoulder to me, I am going to tell some plain truths around this town; I shall tell all about you and Dixon, and show that you, out of your sentimental fancy for the scoundrel, stepped between him and justice and aided him to escape when he was unmasked as Bullion Baron. You may be able to defy public opinion, but how would this fall upon your honored father?"

Rachel was pale with anger. She spoke, but it was only one word, huskily whispered:

"Coward!"

"Twice, Rachel Merton, I have asked you to marry me as an honest man should ask; but you have twice refused me, and once, refused with scorn. I humble myself no more; I simply say that I am as good as a road-agent, and that you have the choice between marrying me and having your secrets told to the whole world!"

He ceased speaking, folded his arms and assumed a theatrical air.

He had held a good position, socially, at Digger's Folly, but his real nature had shown itself at times. It showed strongly now. His face expressed the low, mean, vindictive side of life which was so strong a component of his nature, and Rachel could not help being alarmed.

The prospect he held out was enough to unnerve even a stronger will.

She regarded him in painful silence.

"Take your time to think," he added, "and then let me hear your reply."

There was a sound at one side, and fearful of intrusion, he turned quickly. A third person was there—it was Beatrice Elberdean. He scowled with annoyance, but she stood still and regarded him without a word. Clearly, she had overheard a part of their conversation, if not all, and he knew that it was too late to take a medium course.

"Well, who are you looking at?" he growled, insolently.

"I am looking at you, craven wretch!" was Miss Elberdean's calm reply; "I am wondering what freak of fortune sent such a loathsome object upon the face of the earth!"

"Oh! Beatrice!" cried Rachel, in alarm.

"Well may you say, 'Oh, Beatrice!'" snarled Jackson, pale with rage, "for I tell you there will be a dear settlement here!"

"With me?" questioned Beatrice.

"With you!"

"What will you do?"

"Revenge the insult you have given me."

"How?"

"Beware, lest I forget that you are a woman and strike you with my clenched hand!"

"Rest easy, craven; you will not do that, and here is the proof of my assertion."

The sunlight glittered on the barrel of a revolver she had suddenly drawn.

"Here is the proof," she added.

The bright revolver was not more eloquent to Lewis Jackson than her firm voice and composed manner. He had always known that she was a woman capable of striking deeds, and, now, he did not doubt her readiness to use the revolver if he went to an extreme.

"When I heard your brutal, cowardly speech to Miss Merton," resumed Beatrice, "I felt that nothing except a horse-whipping would reward you as you should be rewarded. You may thank fortune that I was not a man!"

"You are a talking-machine!" sneered Jackson, recovering his wits.

"Allow me to talk further. I am going to answer you for Rachel. Her reply to you is that she sees in you a wretch too vile for her eyes to rest upon; that she defies you; that you are commanded never to speak to her again."

"Girl, beware!" gasped Jackson; "your venomous tongue will yet get you into trouble. Don't tempt me too far!"

"Then keep away from us. Rachel Merton does not treat with your kind."

"Then I will tell her secret!"

"Tell it as soon as you please!"

"Let her speak for herself."

"No. I speak for her."

"Remember the Merton name—"

"Remember, you, the Merton anger!" Beatrice retorted.

Jackson turned to Rachel.

"Do you agree to all this mad girl has said?"

Rachel sought courage from Beatrice's steady eyes and answered:

"Yes."

"Then watch the course of events well. I am not a man to be trifled with, and I shall do all that I have threatened. Digger's Folly shall know that you aided Dixon to escape. I think I see, now, that the Elberdean girl had a share in that game, and I shall be glad to bring her under the ban, too. What I don't know I'll soon learn, and then—look out for me!"

He turned and walked a few paces quickly, then, wheeling toward them, added:

"The only way you can save yourself, Rachel, is to marry me!"

Another moment and he was gone.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE IN A NEW MOOD.

WHEN Jackson had ceased to be heard and seen, Beatrice put away her revolver.

"What have you done?" Rachel asked, in dismay.

"Shown a bully and a ruffian that even a woman may be his match."

Miss Elberdean answered quietly and calmly. She had a peculiar way of saying things indicative of determination. She was never boastful, coarse, hard or unwomanly, but she had confidence in herself, and her strongest speeches were in a matter-of-fact tone.

"But he is frightfully angry," added Rachel.

"I know it."

"And he will vent his anger upon us."

"Pray, Rachel, what else was there for us to do? The alternative, according to his own statement, was for you to marry him. Are you willing to do that?"

"Oh! Beatrice, how can you ask?"

"We have given the man a lesson. It was by mere chance that I overheard the last part of your conversation, and I saw at once that it was a case where the boldest way was the best. Jackson could *prove* nothing. If you had yielded one iota, it would have betrayed the fact that you were afraid of him. Whatever may be the result of the campaign, he was, and is, sure to carry on against you, it was the safest of all ways to defy him, reckless though it may seem."

This argument convinced Rachel, but it could not banish the signs of danger which hovered in the future. Jackson had shown himself evil and unscrupulous, and he would do his best to get revenge.

How he would proceed was not certain.

Rachel felt that any way would be bad enough. Even if he merely went to her father, it would be a severe blow to her. If Benjamin Merton knew that his daughter had not only given her love to a man accused of crime, but had aided him to escape from the lawyer's own house, what would he think of her?

The thought made her shiver.

Beatrice was scarcely less depressed, but she comforted her companion all she could. Then they walked together until Shoglock Brook was passed on the return.

"Here we part for now," Miss Elberdean observed. "I have started to do an errand for Mrs. Partridge, and will now go to the hills again."

"But you may meet Jackson."

"I am quite able to care for myself."

She touched the revolver as she spoke, and felt wholly at ease.

Rachel did not offer any more objections, and they separated. Beatrice recrossed the footbridge and the plain beyond, and entered the hills at a point west of Little Turkey Pass. She wished to find a certain herb, and believed that it could be had there. She was not mistaken, and soon securing what she desired, was on her return when she had another encounter.

Passing through a sparse growth of bushes, she found herself facing a man whose presence gave her a shock.

It was Dan Dixon.

She was surprised and alarmed to see him back, but his manner was easy and matter-of-fact. He raised his hat politely.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I think this is Miss Elberdean."

Beatrice regarded him with fresh surprise.

"It is, most certainly," she answered.

"Probably you recognize me?"

"I do."

"I can scarcely claim your acquaintance, but I venture to address you. I hope you will pardon me. I left Digger's Folly somewhat abruptly, and have not heard from here since. May I ask if there is any news?"

"Bullion Baron has again robbed the stage," Beatrice answered, pointedly.

"He is a bold fellow. Do you know, I rather admire him!"

"You do?"

"Yes. Lawless as is his trade, he does it well, and seems to be an adept. There is much to forgive in such a man."

"He cannot be very shrewd to venture near this town without disguise."

"Has he done that?"

"All depends upon whether you really are the War-Eagle of the Divide."

"I?"

"Yes."

Dixon's face flushed.

"Is this a jest, or do you speak as my enemy? Pray, what have I ever done to deserve such remarks, severely spoken?"

"Find your answer in the past. I am not your judge, sir—at least, I do not wish to be—but your manner is very unsatisfactory. You are certainly lacking in gratitude, and you are a great disappointment to your friends. Considering your past, I wonder that you dare come near Digger's Folly."

Beatrice spoke in a tone of reproof, and with marked coldness, but she did not feel called upon to act very decisively. Mad as the man's course in returning seemed to be, she was not so very deeply surprised—it was in keeping with his erratic nature.

"Miss Elberdean," he answered, warmly, but not intemperately, "I have always heard you spoken of as one who was incapable of much feeling; I believe it now."

"Indeed!"

"Am I not deserving of ordinary courtesy at your hands? Pardon me if I speak complainingly, but I feel that the insinuation that I may be Bullion Baron was prompted solely by malice."

"Do you owe me nothing for the past?"

"To my knowledge—nothing!"

"And I never did you a favor?"

"As far as I know, you never did!"

Beatrice regarded him with hostility which was not unmixed with surprise. Considering how grateful he had been one memorable night—how she had been compelled to order him to repress that gratitude—his present conduct was singular to say the least.

Complainingly as he spoke his manner did not become ungentlemanly. It was plain and to the point, as far as words were concerned, but neither low, coarse nor vindictive.

"Have you forgotten the night-journey through the Pass?" she asked.

"What about that?"

"Have you forgotten the threats of the lynchers against you?"

Again his face flushed.

"Miss Elberdean, I can regard these words only as a deliberate insult. Why are you so bitter against me? Do I deserve nothing at your hands?"

Beatrice frowned.

"You are erratic and contumacious as ever. I have made a good many sacrifices to save you from your fate, but you seem to be incapable of gratitude."

"Pray, what did you ever do for me?"

"Did I not guide you through Little Turkey Pass?"

"Never!"

"Perhaps you will next deny that you are the man Gun-stock?"

"Gun-stock! What absurdity is that? I never heard the name before!"

"Perhaps you were never a prisoner in Mr. Merton's house?"

"I never set foot in his house, in my life!"

"Do you know Rachel?"

"Excuse me, but I decline to answer that."

"Incomprehensible man! Are you sane, or not? From the first your conduct has been erratic, wild and contradictory. For Rachel's sake—not for yours, mind you—I aided you to escape from the grasp of law and guided you through the Pass. While I do not want to hear a word of thanks for myself—I would not endure your thanks—your continued devotion to stubbornness proves that you are unworthy of the least confidence on Rachel's part!"

His face bore a puzzled expression.

"All this is vague. Are you sincere in saying that I was once in 'the grasp of law?'"

"Do you deny it? But why do I ask? You even deny that you are Dan Dixon?"

"Indeed, I do not."

"So you admit that?"

"I never denied it."

"You have denied it repeatedly in my hearing, and in conversation with me."

"Miss Elberdean, I never exchanged a word with you in my life until to-day!" declared the young man, earnestly.

Beatrice did not reply; she did not know how to deal with such a man. If his conduct was governed solely by perversity he was unworthy of her notice; but the opinion was gaining strength in her mind that he was not accountable for what he said and did. If he was mentally deranged, he was deserving of pity most earnest and sincere.

But, to oppose this theory, she noticed that his expression was intelligent, and his eyes calm, clear and natural.

"Were you ever arrested at Digger's Folly?" she asked, experimentally.

"Never!"

"Did you ever make a speech in City Hall?"

"Never!"

"Have you no recollection of an alcove in Benjamin Merton's house?"

"I was never inside that building!"

These denials were made readily and firmly, but in such an intelligible manner that Beatrice could no longer consider the theory of a disordered mind. Annoyed that she had so long conversed with one so childishly perverse, she quickly answered:

"Enough, sir! Our interview shall end here. Leave me, and never dare to address me again!"

#### CHAPTER XIX.

FRESH CAUSE FOR ANXIETY.

BEATRICE turned away, but Dixon spoke quickly.

"One moment!" he requested. "You say that I have been under arrest at the town?"

"So I said," Miss Elberdean replied, coldly.

"There are certain reasons why I wish to refute that statement. Will you go with me to Sheriff Williams and let him settle it?"

"Do you mean that you would go to the town?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that there is a placard posted in several places, offering a reward for the capture of Daniel Dixon, *alias* Bullion Baron?"

"Impossible!"

"It is quite true."

"By heavens! I see a plot in all this, though I cannot grasp it. Miss Elberdean, will you kindly forgive any hasty speech I may have made, and tell me just what has happened at the town since I left there a month ago?"

It seemed to be folly to answer such a request, but Beatrice tried to be patient.

"Williams, and others, have long suspected that a certain Daniel Dixon was, really, Bullion Baron. A week ago he captured the man, and Dixon at that time had in his possession the well-known horse of the War-Eagle. The prisoner was taken to the town, but escaped."

"Did he claim to be me?"

"Yes."

"The claim was false. I have not been near Digger's Folly in a month. Who saw the prisoner, and was so wild as to think him Dan Dixon?"

"For one, I did."

"Surely, you do not claim that I was that prisoner?"

"I do!"

Dixon looked bewildered, and was incapable of a reply for a time, but he finally exclaimed:

"You are wrong, wholly wrong; a resemblance has deceived you. Did this man admit that he was Bullion Baron?"

"No."

"What did he say?"

"That his name was Gun-stock. He would give no other name, nor would he give any account of himself."

"Most likely, he was the War-Eagle."

"Mr. Dixon, you are wasting words, and I warn you that, if you expect to return to Digger's Folly and try to make such an audacious claim work, you will end by getting into prison. You will deceive no one; you do not deceive me, now. I see you plainly, as I saw you then, and can swear that you are the man Gun-stock. Why deny it? You even wear the same clothes you wore then!"

Dixon pressed his hand against his forehead.

"I wonder if I am insane!" he muttered, with an air half-serious and half-amused.

"You should know best."

"I shall need time to think it over. Miss Elberdean, you show signs of impatience—excuse me for having kept you so long. I thank you for your kindness, and hope you will think better of me, sometime. I am going to remain in the hills for an hour or so, and take time to think this over."

He lifted his hat and walked rapidly away, soon disappearing behind the rocks and bushes.

He had hardly made good his retreat before another man appeared in sight. It was Sheriff Williams, and he brought an inquiry quickly into Beatrice's mind—had Dixon seen him, and was that the cause of his sudden departure?

She had not been observed by the sheriff, and she took pains not to be. He passed on, and she was wholly alone.

Back to Digger's Folly she went in a thoughtful mood. What was she to think of Dixon?

He had appeared, as she stated, clad just as he had been at the time he was a prisoner, and his claim that he had a double was too absurd to be considered. She rejected it at once.

The only question was: Was he deranged, or was his course that of a treacherous, ungrateful wretch who found no pleasure except in scoffing at her, and thought his obstinacy amusing.

"I can look upon this man Dixon in but one way," she decided. "From the first he has put all reason to defiance—and decency, too—but I find no sign of aberration. Result, I decide that he is a most odious creature: sane enough to be dangerous, and not insane enough to be a respectable villain!"

She hesitated to tell Rachel of the meeting, for she wanted her cousin to forget Dixon, but such reticence was not advisable.

When the escaped prisoner, instead of expressing gratitude to Rachel, had poured gallant speeches upon Beatrice, the latter had refrained from betraying him to Rachel, but he had now shown that repentance was not a part of his nature.

"He is all bad," Beatrice thought, "and she must know of it, hard as the blow will be!"

The speaker called at the Partridge domicile on her way, and then went home. Greatly to her surprise she learned that Rachel had not arrived. Beatrice sat down to wait, but, at the expiration of an hour she had grown thoroughly uneasy.

When she left Rachel, on the southern side of Shoglock Brook, she understood that the latter was coming home at once.

Miss Elberdean went out to search for her, and called upon every one whom the missing girl would be likely to visit.

She did not find her, nor had she arrived home when Beatrice reached there a second time.

Grave fears began to hover in Miss Elberdean's mind. Was Rachel with Dixon? She might have recrossed the Shoglock Brook, and been accosted by the man.

Resolved to do all she could before giving an alarm, Beatrice returned to the scene of the recent encounters and searched there. She found neither Rachel, Dixon nor Jackson, but,

at the end of her search, did chance upon Nero Agrippa.

"Where have you been?" she asked, abruptly.

"Out fur a walk," he answered.

"Where?"

"There!"

He waved his hand toward the whole of Danger Divide, but the answer was hardly definite enough.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen Miss Rachel?"

"Yes, sah—I mean, yes, ma'am."

"Where was she?"

"Up dar, wid a man."

Nero Agrippa seemed to be as stupid as usual, but he was clear enough in locating the place, and it was beyond where Rachel had gone previous to meeting Jackson.

"How long ago, Nero?"

"Not ober half an hour."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes'm."

"Who was the man?"

"Nebber seen him afore."

More troubled than ever, Beatrice asked further questions, but they only served to make the case look worse. The negro was not to be depended upon in any critical case, but it did look as though he ought to know his young mistress and, also, every resident of Digger's Folly; and he was positive in his assertion that she had been with a stranger.

"Was their manner friendly?" Beatrice asked.

"Didn't hear none ob deir speeches."

"I mean, did they act like friends?"

Nero Agrippa pondered on what seemed to him to be an abstruse question.

"Should say they did, ma'am," he finally replied.

"Did they stand near each other?"

"Widin 'bout six foot."

"Which one was talking?"

"Dunno, sca'cely. I remember, now, su'min' dat indications he war more frien'ly dan she was. He moved up toward her, but she went off backward until he give it up and stood still ag'in."

"What next?"

"I went home."

"Did you see no more?"

"Not a thing."

"Oh! Nero Agrippa!"

Beatrice could not help uttering the reproach. If the negro's account of the interview was correct, Rachel had met some one who was not a friend, and Nero Agrippa had left her at the crisis and, also, left the case in doubt.

Bidding him accompany her, she went to the designated point. There was no sign of Rachel or any one else, and the earth at that place was so hard that no footprint could be discerned.

They searched over an area of considerable size, and Beatrice called Rachel's name, but received no answer. Proof that she had been there, as the negro asserted, was obtained, however.

Just as they were abandoning the search Nero Agrippa discovered a handkerchief partially under a shelving rock, where it had been deposited by the wind.

He secured it, and Miss Elberdean quickly gave the verdict:

"It is Rachel's!"

The discovery troubled her, and added to her perplexity. Rachel had been there. Why? With whom?

Again they searched, and then returned home. The missing girl had not arrived.

Reluctant as Beatrice was, she saw that she must act at once, and she made known to Mr. Merton her fears that something had happened. The father added his efforts, but Rachel was not found.

They had not found her when midnight came.

#### CHAPTER XX.

##### THE DEMON OF THE HUT.

BEFORE the alarm had been sent out in regard to Rachel's disappearance, Tobias Partridge might have been seen sitting on a rock at the southern end of the town. He was engaged in smoking the short black pipe of tradition and real life, and had come there for that especial purpose.

Since Mrs. Grake became an inmate of his house Mr. Partridge had been obliged to put up with a good many inconveniences. The house was small, and, when the sick woman was taken in, he was nearly left out.

The only bed available was in the kitchen, and the only covering at his disposal was a blanket; and he had combined the two and made the best of the situation in a way which recalled the days when he was a miner.

He was very cheerful in this time of affliction. There was not a mean or selfish element in his nature, and he was ready to make any sacrifice for the unfortunate woman.

Without stopping to wonder if there would be any pecuniary return for their trouble, he spread his blanket on the bare floor, contracted a slight twinge of rheumatism, and was without any regret that it must be so.

He only hoped that their charge would come out all right.

On another point he was not so philosophical. Mrs. Partridge had decreed that he could not smoke in the house, and the blow was severe. Believing that the most blessed right of an American citizen was to vote for whom he pleased and to smoke anywhere on his own premises Tobias felt downcast by the edict.

He did not rebel, however; he took his pipe, went outside the town and smoked among the rocks.

He was thus engaged, on the occasion referred to, when he had a visitor. He saw Jonas Hutchinson approaching, and his first impulse was to secrete himself in the bushes and avoid notice. Perceiving, however, that he was already seen, he was too proud to retreat, even from a man he hated.

The money-lender came up quickly, breathing hard from his exertion.

"How do you do, Mr. Partridge?" he inquired, with his most friendly manner.

Tobias became suspicious; the miser had never addressed him so respectfully before.

"I do any way I kin," he answered.

"Lovely evening!"

"S'lubrious!"

"How is business?"

"I'm not in biz. Retired some time sence, but still let Polly take in washin', jest so she won't be home-sick an' down-spirited."

Tobias was sorry that he had turned conversation that way, and his face gradually lengthened as he spoke. Would it cause Hutchinson to refer to his recent visit to Polly?

"We all know your kind spirit, Mr. Partridge, and I—that is why I—would like you to do me a favor," answered Jonas, hesitatingly.

Tobias drew two long whiffs on his pipe.

"'Um!" he then muttered.

"I will—pay you."

"Yes?"

"Certainly. Fifty cents for the night. Good pay, eh? Fifty cents! Good pay!"

Jonas spoke eagerly, anxious to convince the ex-miner, and Tobias grimly answered:

"Gorgeous!"

"Mr. Partridge, I've been robbed!"

"You hev?"

"Yes, and I want your help. It is not a case—that is, I think you and I can do as well as Sheriff Williams; and I will pay you fifty cents."

"What d'ye want ter do?"

"I think I have located the robbers, and have a chance to get my money back, but I need help—need a stronger man than I am. The robber is in the mountains, as I have learned—up on the side of Mount Nibbletoe—and we can go there and take the money away."

"We might take a couple o' lead pills in our hide," Tobias answered, bluntly.

"Ah! but we will surprise him."

"Can't you go an' argue with him?"

"Impossible! He is a bloodthirsty ruffian."

"An' you want me ter risk my life fur the gorgeous reward o' fifty cents. Hey?"

"Oh! but we'll surprise him," Jonas reiterated.

"Better take the sheriff along."

"I think we are enough, and I don't care to have Williams."

Tobias could see that Hutchinson had some secret motive, and he set out to learn what it was. He asked questions without limit, but all to no purpose. The miser evaded all that were important, and left Mr. Partridge in a state of uncertainty.

He was finally obliged to decide one way or another without further clew, and he did not hesitate. He had been suspicious of Jonas ever since the latter's visit to his house, and was not inclined to let any chance slip to learn more about his affairs.

He finally gave the required promise, and sealed it with a pledge of secrecy.

Then they separated.

When darkness fell, Tobias took his revolver and left the house without explanation. He met Hutchinson on the west side of the town, according to agreement.

"Are you all ready?" Jonas asked.

"Yes."

"You didn't tell anybody?"

"No."

Jonas breathed a sigh of relief, and then led the way along the mountain. It was hard work for him, but he was resolute, and his staff was of great help to him. They soon reached the foot of Mount Nibbletoe.

This was a peak which, at a distance, appeared to be an almost perfect cone. It was destitute of trees, grass and all forms of vegetation, as far as could be seen from Digger's Folly, and its prevailing black rocks made it an object of little attraction.

Not a grain of gold had ever been found there, and but few persons had trod its steep sides. Those few represented that its base was a labyrinth of passages which crossed and recrossed each other in a confusing way.

Tobias had reason to know this before a great while.

Led by Hutchinson they were soon in one of the passages—a cleft in the solid rock, with walls from thirty to eighty feet high—but, with darkness and a crooked course to contend with, they

were over an hour in going the next quarter of a mile.

Both were weary when they emerged from this labyrinth and found themselves on the open side of the peak.

There Tobias promptly sat down and looked at the lights of Digger's Folly twinkling hundreds of feet below.

"I'm barred out o' Paradise fur the time bein'," he muttered, "an' it remains ter be seen whther I git back ag'in or leave my bones up hyar fur the buzzards ter use fur gavels in their conventions. Adam an' Eve didn't git back ter Paradise arter they was once put out, but Polly Partridge may be wu'ss off than Adam's wife—Eve wa'n't left a widder!"

He meditated on this point gravely for a moment, and then added, with emphasis:

"It was prob'ly a mighty good thing fur the human race that Eve wa'n't left a widder!"

Jonas aroused from meditation.

"Did you speak?" he asked.

"I asked ef it wa'n't time to go on."

"I think it is. Follow me once more, and be as quiet as you can. We wish to surprise our man."

"Hyars hopin' we sha'n't git surprised ourselves, fur Polly is a right plain-spoken woman, an' ef she thought I died like a fool, she'd jest as quick say so on my gravestone."

"Rest easy, Mr. Partridge; all will be well."

After going sixty rods further Jonas called for more caution, and they dropped upon their hands and knees and crawled along among the rocks. In due time they reached a point where Tobias saw a light. Before he had smelled smoke, and the discovery was not surprising.

"It's a hut built of stones, and mud, and bushes," Jonas whispered, "and the man is there. Crawl along after me, and we'll get a view of him."

This was not hard. They reached the place, and the ex-miner saw a structure eight feet long, six feet wide and perhaps seven feet high. Jonas pointed and directed:

"Look in carefully at the window, and tell me what you see!"

"The window" was only a hole left in the rear wall, at the top of a ledge which made nearly the whole of one side, and Tobias had only to stretch himself out on the rock and investigate.

This he did with great care in all ways.

He looked inside.

What he saw both startled and amazed him.

Some one had found enough wood in the gulches to make a fire, and this was burning at that moment, lighting up the interior well. It revealed a living creature, but Tobias was at a loss, for awhile, to decide whether it was human or beast.

He saw the shaggy hide of a bear, but the wearer stood erect, and his legs were as long as those of a man. One hand was visible, and it was black. This strange being was bending over a small kettle, and in the kettle steamed and simmered some liquids not visible to the watcher.

It was a wild, strange scene, and Tobias was pardonable for imagining for awhile that he had met with a veritable demon from an unknown region.

Who, or what, was this black, hairy creature?

What was he brewing in the kettle?

Tobias had once seen "Macbeth" acted upon the stage, and one weird scene was forcibly recalled. He rubbed his eyes and half-expected to see a band of witches, but no other living creature was visible. The hair-covered object turned, and Tobias saw that it was a big negro.

He had a robe made of one, or more, bear-skins, and, even when his face was visible, he looked wild and forbidding enough. A scowl contracted his brows, and when the watcher speculated on the strength which lay in his long arms, Tobias felt that he had no desire to fight the black man.

Jonas was pulling at Tobias's coat, and the latter condescended to turn.

"What do you see?" whispered the miser.

"Old Nick in his uniform!"

"The negro?"

"Jes' so."

"Do you see the—the money?"

"Not a red."

"What is he doing?"

"Brewin' a three-witches' compound."

The miser showed great interest, but this reply did not satisfy him.

"I don't understand."

"Ef you do, you kin hev my hat. This sort o' thing passes comprehension, an' I must say no person would approve o' our being in sech company!"

Jonas's curiosity overcame his manifest fear, and he, also, crawled to where he could watch.

#### CHAPTER XXI.

##### LED ON TO STRANGE DISCOVERIES.

THE negro had new occupation. He had taken the kettle from the fire, and was pouring its contents into a pint bottle. His hands shook as he did, but it must have been from nervousness.

When the work was done he corked the bottle and held it up, and his eyes gleamed with a strange light.

"What's he goin' ter do with that stuff?" Tobias whispered.

"Heaven knows," Hutchinson answered.

"Strikes me he is crazy."

"I reckon he is."

"Then what do you want o' him?"

"I think he's got my money."

"Then you must be crazy, too."

"Don't judge hastily. A little while ago that negro was as sane as you or I, but he has changed. It must be madness that leads him to wear such a covering as that bearskin. You will see that he is a dangerous man, but I think we are enough for him. Eh?"

"Mebbe so. He's goin' away, ain't he?"

The negro had taken down a hat and put it on, and was making preparations to depart.

"If he goes we shall have a clear coast."

"Fur what?"

"To dig in the hut."

"Why should we dig thar?"

"I think my money must be buried there."

"You kin dig ef you see fit, but I am goin' ter foller that critter an' see what the rumpus is."

"But I wish you to dig."

"Can't help it."

"I shall be left in the lurch if you desert me. This man has a spade, as I am well aware, but it will tire me to use it, and—in fact, your strength is needed in my cause."

"Jonas, I'd hang to, but my curiosity is powerfully bulged out in places ter see what that varmint is, and what he means ter do. He ought ter be follerred, an' I'll do it!"

"Then I sha'n't pay the fifty cents in wages which I promised."

"All right, huckleberry; I'll take my chances ter git rich t'otherwise."

This conversation had been carried on rapidly, and with considerable warmth on the part of Jonas. He felt that Tobias was doing him great injustice to desert him under such circumstances, for he would be left almost helpless.

Tobias did not care for this. He had climbed the rugged side of Mount Nibbletoe out of curiosity, and the best way to satisfy that feeling further seemed to be to follow the bearskin wearer.

The latter left the hut, and Tobias slid down from the ledge.

"Won't you stay?" whined Jonas, gloomily.

"Can't."

"But I'll give you seventy-five cents—"

"Don't rob yerself, Jonas!"

With this advice the ex-miner glided away, and Hutchinson was left to his sorrow and his personal adventure.

The Bear-Man had started along the northern side of the peak, and Tobias followed as carefully as possible. The event recalled the days when he had dug gold along the foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains, and in other places of the wild West. He had met with some adventures then, and come out of them all right, but he realized the fact that he was not so nimble as in the days gone by.

He might regret this night's work.

The negro was not a pleasant-looking man to fight with, Tobias thought. He looked particularly impressive in his wild bear-robe, and the club which he carried in his hand would be a bad weapon to meet.

"Crazy as a loon!" muttered the ex-miner. "Can't imagine what's up. Is thar some method in his freak, an' is that mixtur' he carries ter be put ter any real use? Thar may be more human life on Mount Nibbletoe than is ginerally supposed. Thar may be *death* hyar afore mornin'. I only hope that Polly Partridge won't be left a widder!"

Occupied with thoughts like these, the ex-miner went on, dodging from rock to rock, and doing his best to avoid notice.

The Bear-Man did not ascend the peak any further, but kept along the north side until the lights of the town were concealed by intervening rocks. They were approaching the wildest part of Danger Divide. Digger's Folly lay to the east, and the Rolling Trail was a mile to the north. Except for these two points known to civilization, the surroundings were wild and unsettled.

Tobias began to wonder where their journey was to end, and to feel some doubts, but the end came quicker than he had anticipated.

The leader reached a gulch, went close to one rocky wall, and ended by disappearing there. When the pursuer reached the place, he found a roofed fissure, with a dark passage beyond, but no sign of the Bear-Man.

Tobias was not a coward, but he hesitated to go further. Then his pride arose, and he grasped his revolver more tightly and went ahead into the utter darkness.

"Ef I run upon the critter hyar," he thought, "Polly will be a widder afore sun-up, an' I sha'n't ever be nigh enough ter my gravestone ter look up from the cold ground an' read the epigraph!"

He went on in a passage about the size of a hall in a common house, with walls and roof of solid rock. It was fairly dry, and not even a

loose stone disturbed the level of the sandy floor.

It seemed like a long journey before there was any change in the order of things, and he grew more and more doubtful, but the inevitable change came suddenly when it came at all.

A bend in the passage abruptly brought a glare of light to his notice, and a strange scene was revealed, as well.

The passage was at an end, and in its place was to be seen a large rock-chamber. Its width was at least thirty-five yards, and its length not to be discovered from where Tobias stood.

At various points in the wall were fixed burning torches, and their number was such as to light the chamber well.

In the middle of this space were a man and a horse, and Tobias drew a quick breath.

The man was Bullion Baron!

There could be no doubt of this fact, unless some one was masquerading in his place, for the ex-miner had seen him on Rolling Trail. Moreover, the horse was the War-Eagle's famous charger, unless the observer was equally at fault.

Master and horse were singularly engaged. The road-agent held a light whip in his hand, and was putting the animal through a series of maneuvers like those to be seen in the ring of a circus. He cracked the whip; he gave orders; and the horse obeyed all promptly, and with an air which indicated that he took pleasure in the work.

Around and around he went, in obedience to his master's commands, now galloping, then rearing, and, anon, indulging in various tricks, and his well-pleased manner was watched by his master's cheerful voice.

There were several boulders near where Tobias stood, and he ensconced himself behind one of these and watched further.

Anxious to know who Bullion Baron was, he studied the man carefully, but without result.

The famous outlaw wore his mask, and Tobias could distinguish nothing familiar in his voice.

One discovery he did make, however. He was not the only person acting the spy. Behind another boulder was a dark form, and careful attention revealed the fact that it was the Bear-Man.

His operations assumed new importance. Why was he there with the mysterious mixture bottled up and carefully carried? Plainly, he was not a friend of the War-Eagle, or he would not be skulking behind the rocks.

The exhibition came to an end. Bullion Baron spoke a few words of praise to his horse, put out all the lights except one, and then he and the animal started away.

Promptly the Bear-Man arose and followed, and after the latter came Tobias.

"I'm in fur the war," muttered the ex-miner, "an' I reckon I may as wal face the enemy. All that worries me is that no historian is by ter write up my expl'ites as Julian Caesar's was writ up, an' Polly will never know jest when ter put on her widder's gowns. Poor Polly! I pity her!"

Bullion Baron and his horse went on in perfect darkness for some time, much to Tobias's apprehension, but light finally appeared again. A second chamber met the ex-miner's gaze, and when the negro skulked into cover, Tobias did likewise.

Then he saw further advance neatly cut off.

The size of the second chamber was not to be made out, as it was erratic of shape, but the visible part was sixty feet wide and one hundred feet long. Like the other, it was lighted with torches.

Between this chamber and the road-agent's pursuers was a chasm twenty feet wide. Across this there had been a bridge of light wood, but Bullion Baron had no sooner crossed than he drew it after him.

Only the yawning cleft was left, and to leap it was a sheer impossibility.

They were as much cut-off from the War-Eagle as though all of Mount Nibbletoe lay between them.

The horse disappeared in an alcove, while its master lighted a cigar and began to pace back and forth. He was not long left undisturbed. A woman came out of another recess, and Tobias opened his eyes wide in astonishment.

He had met the greatest surprise of all. The woman was Rachel Merton!

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE BEAR-MAN USES THE MIXTURE.

THE ex-miner was not deceived; Rachel was in Bullion Baron's cave. Tobias found it a hard fact to credit, and it set certain suspicions afoot in his mind.

Was it not possible that he had been humbugged, that the War-Eagle was, really, Dan Dixon, and that Rachel was well aware of the fact?

This unjust idea was discarded almost as soon as it was conceived, for though he could not overhear a word, Rachel's manner was both hostile and sorrowful.

Bullion Baron bowed so low that the mimic eagle on his head seemed about to make a down-

ward shoot, and his air was one of great respect and gallantry, but Rachel did not seem to be favorably impressed.

She spoke, and Tobias was moved to deep pity.

"Poor lamb! the War-Eagle has gobbled her up, an' she's heart-broke," he murmured. "See her lips quiver, and how long her face is! Yes, an' I kin almost see the tears in her eyes. How in chain lightnin' did she get hyar, anyhow?"

It was a puzzle which the ex-miner was unable to solve.

He did not have a very protracted view of the couple, for they turned and went back in the direction from which Rachel had come. Bullion Baron offered her his arm, but she declined it without ceremony.

When they disappeared Tobias fell into thought.

"It may be 'twas Providence directed my steps hyar ter-night, fur the leetle gal is sartainly in need o' help. Great jumpin' painters! I'd hate ter hev my Polly in the War-Eagle's hands! I'll advise her not ter go out an' let him see how poaty she is—she had better stick clost ter her washin'!"

Mr. Partridge shook his head gravely, meditated on the dangers that beset his partner in life, and then came back to Rachel.

"I'm nigh her, but how be I ter help her away? Can't cross that measly chasm myself, an' the road-robber won't let her come hyar. Don't see my way cl'ar, by 'tarnal tiger-cats!"

There was a stir near him, and the negro, forgotten in the rush of other events, arose from behind the boulder.

Tobias could almost have touched him, but this was far from his desire. Whatever the Bear-Man might be, Tobias wanted nothing to do with him.

The negro crossed the passage and stood close to the rocky wall. Looking sharply, Tobias discovered a long spout which crossed the chasm from side to side, and the glitter of some silvery, moving substance caught his eye.

"Bullion Baron's water-pipe," thought the miner. "Wonder ef I couldn't make a famine o' drink, hyar, an' bring the critter ter terms—as soon as this half-animal man is gone."

The negro, however, was not ready to go, and Tobias saw him draw the cork from the big bottle he had brought.

"What's up?" thought the ex-miner.

Slowly the bottle was tipped, and then all of the liquid ran out into the spout.

Tobias felt a chill of horror.

Had the drinking-water been poisoned?

Carefully and patiently the Bear-Man had brewed some strange mixture, and now, after bringing it a long distance, had poured it into the water. And, as he turned partially, an expression of triumph was on his dark face.

Partridge was alarmed. He had no love for the road-agent, and believed that it would be a good deed to remove him from active life, but Rachel was as much in danger as any one else.

"May the good Lord protect her!" thought Tobias. "It would put all Digger's Folly in mournin' if the poor lamb was p'isoned by this crazy critter!"

For a moment his anger burned so strongly against the Bear-Man that he was tempted to run forward and hurl him into the abyss, but he did not lose sight of the fact that the negro was a man of muscle.

Having accomplished his work the Bear-Man skulked back to cover, while the ex-miner looked at the water in great uneasiness. No doubt, there was a bucket, or some other receptacle, in the cave to catch it when it left the spout. As it was a flowing stream it would gradually carry off anything harmful, but it would take a long while to get rid of so much liquid as had been sent along the tiny spout.

"Ef Rachel drinks on't, she's a dead angel! What be I to do? Shall I yell out an' give the warnin' even ter the War-Eagle, an' so let him know I'm hyar?"

Tobias glanced at the negro and found answer.

If he valued his own life he would do well not to run contrary to the big man's plans.

Half an hour passed, and all of his scheming brought no result. Bullion Baron and Rachel remained invisible, and that part of the cave open to Tobias's view grew dark gradually as the torches burned down.

The Bear-Man had been motionless for some time, but he finally arose partially until, located on his hands and knees, he looked more like a bear than ever. His gaze was fixed ahead, and Tobias was surprised to hear a gasping exclamation, as though his neighbor was frightened.

The ex-miner looked the same way.

A creature was moving in the cave, but it was neither the War-Eagle nor Rachel.

Tobias did not know what it was.

He saw a tall figure which had the form and face of a man, but the face was very pale, and the garments upon the figure were white and loose.

It was a ghastly sight, but Tobias had enough common sense not to be influenced by supernatural fears. Whatever might be the explanation of his ghostly promenade, he felt sure that

he saw a human being wrapped up in a sheet, or some such object.

Not so with the negro; he was frightened to a point bordering on a total collapse.

Tobias could not see his face plainly, but his teeth chattered and his breath was drawn gaspingly.

The figure in white walked forward.

"It's old master's ghost!" whispered the Bear-Man, audibly. "He's come back from the grave. I reckon he blames me for what happened to my mistress!"

If Jonas Hutchinson had been there he, too, would have seen something familiar in the ghostly walker, for it was the same that had appeared to him in his room and caused him to faint.

Around the cave went the thing in white, and even Tobias began to feel disturbed. The walker went with a slow, easy motion, looking straight ahead and appearing to take no notice of what he saw.

At last he walked to the chasm and stood gazing down in a vague style. After a pause his lips moved and distinct words passed them.

"Come to me, Dusky Dan," he muttered.

The Bear-Man sprung to his feet. He had been quaking with fear, and this ghostly adjuration was too much for his courage. Springing up with a husky cry he rushed back into the darkness at full speed and soon ceased to be heard.

If the figure in white had seen or heard him it gave no sign. It stood by the chasm, and still looked down in a thoughtful manner.

"I'm in fur it!" muttered Tobias. "The nigger has gone back on me, an' I've got ter stan' the racket alone. A more p'ison-lookin' varmint than that ghost I never seen. Wonder ef I could git on frien'ly terms with him?"

The white walker muttered something unintelligible, and Tobias yielded to a sudden impulse.

"Hullo, thar!" he called out.

The phantom raised its head.

"Come over hyar!" Tobias added, heroically.

"Who speaks?" asked the unknown, sepulchrally.

"Me!"

"Who are you?"

"A man that ain't got ter be a ghost yit, but has great chances o' bein' one soon. Kin you give me any valler'ble p'ints?"

"I am a disembodied spirit," proclaimed the ghost, dismally.

"Jes' so. Say, d'ye see the portable bridge at your feet?"

"I see all things."

"So've I seen about all on 'em ter-night. But about the bridge. Jest sling it over the chasm, will ye, pard? an' let me cross. That's a good feller!"

"My earthly labors are done."

"But this'll be mere fun—reg'lar picnic. All you hev ter do is ter run the bridge over. D'ye see?"

"The blind see not; the deaf hear not; the dumb speak not."

"You wander in yer remarks, mister, but see hyar. Be you one o' Bullion Baron's men?"

"I am no man's man."

"Jes' so. Then sling over the bridge."

"The greatest bridge of all is the Bridge of Life, and it reaches from the cradle to the grave. All men travel it, and lo! 'tis a dismal multitude!"

"You evade the p'int. Won't ye do me a favor?"

"Favor ye no man to his liking, for he may be made strong thereby, and, like Samson, pull down the temple upon ye. Farewell!"

Changing his slow, monotonous delivery to more abrupt utterance, the ghost spoke his farewell, turned, stalked away and disappeared in a recess.

"Queer old blade!" muttered Tobias. "Is he crazy, or ain't he? Ef he's one o' the War-Eagle's men, he'll hev the gang on ter me in the twinklin' of a deer's hoof. Ef he ain't so, what's he prowlin' around hyar fur? Queer case, all around. Wish he'd sling the bridge over, fur I feel that Rachel ain't safe. Ef the nigger p'isoned the water, that fine gal may drink on't an' go ter jine the angels ahead of—Outch!"

Tobias broke off suddenly. A hand had been laid upon his shoulder, and he turned to see a man beside him.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

#### GUN-STOCK'S LASO.

THE ex-miner was startled. His first theory was that the Bear-Man had returned, and that, in his opinion, was enough to scare any one nearly out of his wits, but, as he looked up, the light was strong enough to show him that the new-comer wore garments of common kind, instead of a bear-robe.

Still, he was not pleased.

The fellow might be a follower of the War-Eagle.

"Hullo!" finally spoke the stranger.

"Hullo!" Tobias answered, faintly.

"Who are you?"

"My name is Simon Snaggs," the ex-miner replied.

"Mine is Tobias Partridge!"

"The blazes it is!"

"Yes."

"Sa-ay, d'ye know I am Tobias Partridge?"

"What! are we named alike?"

"No, we ain't; you hev recognized me, an' are tryin' ter git a joke on ter me. Who be you?"

Tobias had risen, and was doing his best to return the recognition, but his eyes were not good enough to achieve that result in the darkness. There was a period of silence, and he shook his head.

"Don't know ye," he admitted.

"Did you ever hear of any one named Gun-stock, friend?"

"Huh! be you that critter?"

"I am, worthy Tobias!"

Mr. Partridge put out his hand quickly.

"Dan Dixon, I'm right glad ter see yer—"

"Easy, my good man! I am no more Daniel Dixon than I am Noah. Recollect that I denied that when at Merton,"

"Say!" exclaimed Tobias, "I've run up ag'in' some o' the most outraginest folks lately that I ever seen, but you beat the lot. Hyar me an' you hev smoked many a pipe tergether, an' now you won't admit that you *are* you. Durn sech work, say I!"

"Calmly, Tobias! I owe you much good will, for you were one who gave me aid on that eventful night. I am truly grateful, and want to be your friend, but I can't admit that I am a man of whom I know nothing. My name is Gun-stock!"

Tobias regarded him sulkily.

"Ef you ain't Dan—though you be—I owe you no good opinions, so, let me ask what you're doin' in Bullion Baron's cave?"

"I am here to capture him!"

"Oh!"

It was a sarcastic exclamation, and Tobias looked at his companion strong in the faith that he was confronting the man he had recently seen wearing the imitation eagle,

"I have been working patiently," resumed Gun-stock, "and have never been far away from Digger's Folly. I had made the statement that I would capture Bullion Baron, and thereby prove my innocence of the charge put upon me, and I set out to do it. After a long time I learned that he had a cave here, and, as you see, I am investigating. I hope to capture him tonight."

"Hum!" muttered Tobias, skeptically.

"I presume you are on the same errand?"

"Say, d'ye know who's in hyar?"

"No."

"Rachel."

"Ah! Mr. Merton's daughter. Isn't that reckless? Why has she come?"

"You don't know, o' course?"

"I do not."

"She's the War-Eagle's prisoner."

"Then she must be rescued," answered Gun-stock calmly. "I owe a good deal to that worthy and kind-hearted lady, and now is the chance to repay the debt. Can we cross this chasm?"

"Don' know."

Tobias answered with fresh curtness. The indifferent way in which Gun-stock spoke of Rachel was fuel for the fire. It was not enough that the man expressed a desire to help her; he seemed forgetful of the past, and there appeared to be storms ahead for Benjamin Merton's daughter.

"There is a bridge here, as you doubtless know, and I have made some preparation to the end of using it," the young man added. "Can you throw a lasso, Mr. Partridge?"

"I kin."

"Throw this, then."

Gun-stock flung the loose end of a rope over his companion's arm, and unwound the remainder from his own shoulder, where he had carried it. The affair proved to be of horse-hair, elaborately made.

"I ain't sure I kin ketch on."

"Lasso one end of the bridge, and then draw it across to us. You will observe a peg near the front, which has probably been used to keep it from slipping when across the chasm. Get the noose over that, and we can draw it over easily."

Tobias shook his head slowly.

"It'll be a good cast that nooses the peg."

"Make a good one, then."

"The peg scarcely shows. You must 'a' looked sharp ter see it."

"I've been here before."

Gun-stock spoke with an air of frankness and unconcern, but he did not impress Tobias favorably. He was a good deal of the opinion that Gun-stock had been there before, and that he was being used for the latter's sport.

His air was sulky as he made the first cast of the lasso. He did not expect to succeed, and his expectations were not proved vain for some time. Again and again he sent out the coil of horse-hair, but, as he had foreseen, it was no easy matter to catch the peg.

At last he accomplished the feat, and the lasso was fast.

"Here we are," observed Gun-stock, cheerfully. "Now let us see if we can pull it over without alarming the outlaw."

"How many men does he hev?" asked Tobias.

"I've heard that he worked alone."

"Do ye b'lieve it?"

"I have never seen any one around here except the War-Eagle and an old woman who seems to be his servant. If there are other men I, at least, am armed."

"So be I, but I sort o' surmise that won't be no fightin'," explained Tobias, whose suspicions did not abate in the least.

They pulled at the lasso, and the bridge moved as easily as was to be expected. It was strong, but not particularly heavy, and this was well for them when the foremost end dangled over the chasm. It was all they could do to keep it from falling, and, as it pressed more and more against them they were afraid the lasso would slip from the peg.

After hard labor they pulled it across, however.

The abyss was bridged.

"Now," added Gun-stock, "we want to do some careful work. Victory is usually with him who gets the first blow, and we want to win. I have set my heart upon taking Bullion Baron to Digger's Folly as a prisoner, in order to prove my own innocence."

"Hope you'll do it."

For an amiable man Tobias was very curt with his answer, but Gun-stock did not show any resentment. They crossed the bridge, and stood in the famous road-agent's quarters at last.

Gun-stock now manifested great caution, and they crept along as silently as possible. If he was acting a part he certainly did it well, and Tobias imitated his careful progress.

A passage was found to the left which promised well, and they followed it for twenty yards. Then it widened suddenly to a second cave. A fire had been burning at one side, but it had died down so that it gave but little light.

Darkness and silence reigned supreme.

The adventurers hesitated for some time, but Gun-stock suddenly adopted a bolder course. Crossing the chamber, he picked a half-consumed brand from the fire and swung it in space until it broke into a strong blaze.

The light fell upon jagged rocks which formed walls and roof, but no human being was visible.

Near to Tobias stood a bucket into which water was falling from a spout, and the ex-miner was seized with fresh fear.

What if the Bear-Man had really poisoned the water, and all the inmates of the cave were already dead from drinking of it?

Gun-stock proceeded in a bold manner. With the brand in one hand and a revolver in the other he began to search, and his labors were soon rewarded. Alcoves were numerous, and in one of these was found a human being.

Tobias was at the leader's shoulder, and, when the latter paused, the ex-miner discovered Rachel.

She lay upon a blanket, pale and still, and with her eyes closed.

Tobias's heart sunk. Had they come too late?

Suddenly her eyes opened, and then she started up partially. She made a movement as though to shield her eyes with her hand, but something caught and held her arm.

Tobias sprung forward.

"You poor angel!" he exclaimed; "you're tied up like a pig fur market. Turn a bit, an' let me cut ye loose!"

If Rachel heard, she gave no evidence of the fact. She was looking steadily at the second man.

"Daniel!" she murmured. "Do I dream, or is he really here to save me?"

The man indicated advanced briskly.

"Be at ease, Miss Merton," he answered, kindly. "I am not Daniel, but Gun-stock; but I am your friend. Let me ask one question at once: Where is Bullion Baron?"

### CHAPTER XXIV.

#### SEARCHING FOR BULLION BARON.

TOBIAS had not confined his work to words. He saw that Rachel was bound, and he promptly used his knife, freed her and helped her to her feet. She stood without any trouble, and his fear that she had drank of the water was nearly dissipated.

"Yes," he added; "whar is Bullion Baron?"

"Haven't you seen him?" Rachel asked.

"No."

"He was in the cave—he and the old woman."

"His servant?"

"Yes."

"Then they must be nigh ter hand."

"Remain here, you two," Gun-stock directed. "I will go and seek for the enemy—I am particularly anxious to meet the War-Eagle."

"Don't go!" Rachel exclaimed.

"Why not?"

"Something may happen to you, Daniel!"

"My dear young lady," Gun-stock answered, "there is no one to whom I owe more than to you, but I must again correct your mistake. I am not Daniel Dixon, but the same wandering adventurer you saw a prisoner at Digger's Folly. In brief, I am Gun-stock!"

"I've a good mind ter punch yer head, Dan!" growled Tobias, in an angry undertone.

Rachel's face had grown downcast and sad, but it was suddenly changed in aspect by a flash of spirit.

"Surely, I do not wish to claim your attention if you are obliged to disown your identity to get rid of my persecution, sir!" she retorted.

"My dear young lady—"

"That'll do!" put in Tobias, sharply. "Go look fur the War-Eagle, Mr. Gun-rust, or whatever yer name is. I don't imagine you need ter fear that Bullion Baron will hurt you!"

The thrust was not to be misinterpreted, but Gun-stock remained unmoved by it.

"Have no fear; I will try to take him by surprise. Do not leave here until I return, and I will keep you waiting as little time as possible."

No one objected, but, before going, he looked first at Tobias and then at Rachel, and the pantomime seemed like a plea to the ex-miner that he would try to straighten out the tangle.

He would have appealed in vain even if he had used plain words. When he was gone, Mr. Partridge spoke freely:

"Don't ye give another thought to Dan Dixon, my poor lamb!" he directed. "We throw away frien'ship on ter him, anyhow; an' I hev an idee that he's Bullion Baron, hisself—in fact, I am almost dead sure on't. We've been took in by Dan, little woman; now let us forget him!"

Rachel regarded the speaker with eyes moist with tears, but her answer was firm.

"You intend all for the best, Tobias, but you are very wrong. Give Daniel time, and he will vindicate himself."

"So yer think he's actin' a part?"

"Yes, or—"

Rachel stopped, and Tobias quietly asked:

"Kin you tell me what motive he could have fur denyin' his identity to his two best friends, when nobody ain't round ter see an' hear?"

"Friend Tobias, we should not judge others," Rachel answered, and though she tried to dispose of the matter lightly, there was enough of pathos in her voice to touch the ex-miner.

His heart was tender and pitiful toward her, and he let the matter drop.

Gun-stock returned at the end of ten minutes.

"I cannot find a person in the whole cave," he announced.

"How many did you see hyar, little woman?" asked Tobias.

"Only Bullion Baron and his aged female servant."

"No sign of the ghost?"

"What ghost?"

"An old man in a white sheet."

"I have seen no such person."

"There has been at least three hyar!" declared Tobias. "I reckon I will take a turn aroun'. My eyes was allowed to be right sharp when I hunted gold, an' I could see a nugget the size o' a bushel-basket as soon as anybody goin' on two legs. I may find 'sign' hyar."

"This is not the War-Eagle's home-cave," remarked Rachel.

"No?"

"No. I heard enough to satisfy me of that. He has several resorts, and uses them to suit his fancy and his idea of safety. He and the old woman may have gone to the home-cave."

Tobias was not pleased to hear this news, but it did not keep him from searching. It might have been said in Rachel's hearing with an object, and then, again, Gun-stock might not have searched so well as an honest man would.

The ex-miner went his way. First of all he flung the water-bucket down the chasm and destroyed the spout, and then he searched for the enemy.

He found no one.

Every chamber of the cavern was duly looked through, but there were many narrow passages which he had no time to follow. Through some of them the old woman and the horse must have gone—he was not so sure that Bullion Baron *had* gone—and they might be far away.

Abandoning the attempt at last, he returned to Rachel and Gun-stock.

He found them separated by a considerable distance, and it needed no explanation to tell that they had arrived at an explanation. Tobias's manner was curt and ungracious as he made his report.

"Miss Merton must be conducted home," observed Gun-stock, after a pause.

"Wal, I should smile!"

"Can you do this?"

"Me?"

"The fact is, I am very anxious to capture Bullion Baron. I have set my heart upon this, for reasons which you may be able to surmise—I have been accused unjustly, and the way to prove my innocence is to reveal the real outlaw. I would like to remain here and try to trap him."

"Mister Man," cried Tobias, warmly, "we are in the heart o' Mount Nibbletoe; it's a long tramp an' a hard tramp, an' a dangerous one, too, ter Digger's Folly. Will you see a helpless leetle woman go with no guard but an old codger like me?"

"The gentleman is welcome to remain here!" Rachel exclaimed, with spirit, and with a flush

of anger in her cheeks. "No one will urge him to go."

"But I am willing if there is danger," protested Gun-stock.

"Do not trouble yourself."

"I intend to do my duty when I see it. I will go."

"Thank ye fur nothin'!" growled Mr. Partridge.

"You wrong me; but I shall yet prove myself less black than I am painted. Come! We will go to Digger's Folly!"

He spoke with an air of determination, and no one opposed his decision further.

They left the cavern without delay. There was nothing of value, financially or otherwise, they could secure, the almost total barrenness of the place corroborating the theory that the War-Eagle cave was elsewhere.

When they reached the chasm Rachel pointed out a fact which had escaped Tobias's notice; there was an ingenious series of wires by which Bullion Baron could operate the bridge without much labor.

"We'll break the wires, an' throw the bridge down the chasm," said Tobias.

"I don't approve of that," answered Gun-stock.

"Oh! ye don't!"

"No. It will destroy my chance to catch the road-agent."

"Is that yer reason, or do ye fear ter discomode ther'tarnal critter?"

"Still suspicious! Well, have your own way!"

Gun-stock snapped the wires in two as he spoke, and then essayed to push the bridge down the chasm. Partridge gave his aid, and the work was soon accomplished. A splash far below showed that the structure had gone well out of reach.

The retreat was then resumed.

Tobias looked for the Bear-Man, but did not see him, or any sign of him. The worthy ex-miner felt that the night had been one of many mysteries.

Why had Jonas Hutchinson gone on such a wild errand to the mountain hut?

Who was the Bear-Man, and what meant his strange movements?

Who was the alleged ghost, and why was he wandering around in such a fashion?

What had become of all these persons?

These conundrums were of interest to him, but more serious work was at hand. They were on the barren side of Mount Nibbletoe, and Digger's Folly was far enough away to discourage any one. As the way was so rough, it was no trifling journey for Rachel.

Gun-stock now proved himself useful. His manner had always been courteous to Rachel, and he took her arm respectfully and gave her assistance in a ready and skillful way.

Tobias found himself reduced to the position of torch-bearer, nor was he sorry it was so. He let the young couple alone, as a rule, and had strong hopes that something would come of it. Certainly, Gun-stock was kind enough.

And so they wandered along Nibbletoe's rugged side, and while they trod gulches more or less imposing, and crossed chasms more or less dangerous, the night wore away.

It was a long and weary journey.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### A CHAMPION APPEARS.

DIGGER'S FOLLY illustrated, the following day, the old saying that after a storm comes a calm.

Rachel was again at home, and those who had searched for her abandoned the work with more or less relief. She was a favorite, and few were there, if any, but rejoiced to know she was safe.

One thing was commented upon as peculiar. Accounts conflicted as to where she had been, and how she had been rescued. Tobias Partridge was credited with being the hero of the affair, and the name of Gun-stock did not enter into the narrative, so it was clear that something had been kept back.

Of course the people did not know that Gun-stock had any share in the matter, but they did know that accounts differed. However, Rachel was Benjamin Merton's daughter, and every one admitted the right of the Mertons to do as they pleased.

They were rich, intelligent, high-minded and loyal to Digger's Folly; hence, they were privileged characters.

Rachel was not seen outside the house until after noon. Then she and Beatrice left their home and the town, and walking north, crossed Shoglock Brook and wandered toward Little Turkey Pass.

There was much of defiance in their manner; they were rather anxious to see Dixon and force him to speak plainly, or to make the attempt. Beatrice was more than ever severe in speaking of him, while Rachel wavered. Her affection and confidence had been shaken a good deal, but she found some comfort in the fact that he had been very kind during the homeward journey from Mount Nibbletoe.

She still professed the opinion that he would redeem himself, but she did not speak with the confidence of old.

As for Beatrice, she felt that Rachel's peace of mind demanded a settlement of the case, and she wished to take Mr. Gun-stock in hand.

Hence, the present journey was a direct challenge, albeit made in the dark, as it were, for him to appear there as he had appeared once before.

The scheme bore fruit, but of a kind not to their liking.

Not long had they been seated on the ledge to which they directed their steps when foreign sounds interrupted their low-toned conversation. They looked, and great was their annoyance to see Lewis Jackson.

The railroad man came up quickly, a smile on his face which indicated pleasure.

"Good-afternoon, ladies!" was his greeting.

"I hardly expected to see you here."

"The surprise is mutual," answered Miss Elberdean, calmly. "We came to this lonely spot, because we wished to be alone."

The suggestion was plain enough, but it did not disturb Jackson.

"I've often felt that way, myself," he remarked, carelessly, as he took a seat near them. "The human mind is like a small stream on low ground—it gets clogged up, now and then, and needs to be set a-going. Solitude is a spado, and Time is a workman—combine the two, and we get set right. How's that for philosophy? Miss Merton, I trust you are well?"

"I am," Rachel replied, ungraciously.

"What we all need here is more life and excitement, and we shall have it when the railroad is put through. As you are aware, I am an agent for the enterprise, and I am laboring hard. Mr. Merton, Mr. Lombard and other influential men here are heartily in sympathy with the idea, and we hope to see the rails laid inside of six months."

Jackson ceased speaking, but no one answered.

"By that time," he added, after a pause, "I hope to have a home and a wife here."

"We are not interested in your private affairs, Mr. Jackson," Beatrice curtly replied.

"You ought to be."

"We had?"

"Yes."

"You over-estimate your importance."

"Excuse me, but I can prove that the false estimate is on your part. You think you can freeze me with ice, or scorch me with fire, at your own royal will; but at cards we never know who holds the trumps until the game is played out."

"Reserve your saloon-talk for other ears, sir, if you please!"

"Not so fast! I am speaking to just the right parties, and I demand a hearing."

"Demand!"

"Even so."

"Lewis Jackson, there are men in yonder town who will chastise the insulter of woman—"

"Wait! Let us advance systematically. I told you that I was going to learn how Daniel Dixon escaped from Merton's house that night, and I have done so!"

"So your fiction is ready?"

"The truth is ready. Nero Agrippa has confessed!"

"What could he confess?"

"That you, Rachel and Partridge, tricked the sheriff and freed Dixon; that you and Nero Agrippa conducted the fellow through yonder Pass."

"Ridiculous!"

"Softly! I told you, before, that as soon as I had positive proof I should make certain demands. I make them now; I love Rachel, and want her for my wife."

"You insult her by the proposal, after having prefaced it with the word 'demand.'"

"Those who have the power can rule the hour. Can you afford to have the secret told abroad, Miss Merton? Think how it would sound to have people say: 'Lawyer Merton's daughter liberated Bullion Baron!'"

"I deny that I did."

"Let me be merciful. Will you marry me, Rachel?"

Jackson spoke carelessly, indifferently, but it was evident that he was not jesting. His previous outbreak had shown clearly what he was, and they knew that they had to deal with an unscrupulous and determined villain.

To his last question Rachel made an emphatic answer:

"Never!"

"Then all of Digger's Folly shall know that it was you who liberated Bullion Baron!"

Before another word could be spoken, a man stepped out of an adjacent line of bushes, and confronted Jackson with the terse command:

"Go slow, man!"

Already Jackson's hostile tongue had told the story to one person it seemed. The new-comer was Emory Lombard, the Commissioner of Public Improvements, and his manner indicated that he had heard considerable.

"Remember that you address a lady!" he added.

Jackson arose quickly.

"You here, Lombard!" he exclaimed, with a scowl.

"I am here, but I should say you would wish

me anywhere else. You have surprised me, sir, by your words!"

"Well, what of it?"

"What of it? Jackson, you have taken a place here as one of our foremost men, and have been honored by our people. As such a favored being, you should hold to lofty aims and deeds!"

"Empty words!"

"True words!" Lombard retorted. "A man never sinks lower than when persecuting a woman; he never rises to nobler heights than when acting as a defender!"

Lombard was a man who had no cause to reproach Nature for her work in his behalf, and he had never made a better appearance than at that moment. Habitually grave and thoughtful, he did not flush with enthusiasm now, like a visionary schoolboy, but uttered his words with quietness which did not hide a certain depth of feeling.

"Are you speaking two words for yourself?" retorted Jackson.

"Now you are absurd," Lombard answered, calmly. "As an officer of the town, and a friend of Benjamin Merton, I have a duty to perform when I see his daughter in trouble. Jackson, I have known you for some time, and credit you with a nature hasty rather than ignoble; do not force me to alter my opinion!"

"You talk like a parson."

"Like a friend, you mean."

"Perhaps I am not as much of a villain as you think."

"I accuse no one of being a villain," returned Lombard, with dignity. "I think I am sufficiently the friend of Mr. Merton and his daughter that I may venture to intimate that there may have been hasty, ill-advised words on both sides. As I understand it, you have sought Miss Rachel's hand, and she has declined to surrender it?"

"Yes," growled Jackson.

"And you return to the attack with threats! For shame, Lewis!"

"I have been scorned—"

"I have refused him three times," interrupted Rachel. "Isn't that enough?"

"Certainly, it ought to be; but," added Lombard, with a grave smile, "a man is pertinacious when he is enamored of a young lady. Don't let us condemn Jackson wholly; I want to make peace here."

"It is useless."

"Why?"

"Because he has stooped to threats!"

"A grave charge, surely. But, suppose he promised not to carry out his threats?"

Rachel hesitated.

"Can't we have peace on that basis?" Lombard added.

"We cannot!" declared Beatrice, firmly.

"And why not, Miss Elberdean?"

"Because I refuse to let Rachel make peace!"

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

##### AN AUDACIOUS MAN'S LETTER.

LOMBARD bowed gravely.

"I presume that Miss Elberdean has her reasons," he remarked, gracefully.

"So I have. I think Rachel would disgrace herself by making peace with a man who had threatened her, and tried to drive her into matrimony with him by such means," Beatrice readily explained.

"No one can dispute your logic, but it must be admitted that there is something on the other side. Unjust though he may be, Jackson is angry; and he threatens to betray an important secret."

"I will say, Miss Elberdean, that I have for several days suspected that the facts of Dixon's escape were as Jackson has now represented. So I had studied it out, but I never tried to prove it."

"Benjamin Merton and I are too good friends for me to knowingly cause him trouble, and I know it would break his heart if trouble came to his daughter."

"Now that matters stand as they do, I advise prudence. Don't let this secret be spread abroad; don't wound your father, Miss Merton. Let an amicable understanding be reached!"

Lombard spoke earnestly, and persuasively, and even Beatrice wavered. If she had liked Dixon, she would have declined to consider any compromise, but the thought occurred to her, why should they cause themselves misery and disgrace for the sake of an adventurer believed to be Bullion Baron?

Every one seemed to feel that the decision rested with Miss Elberdean.

All looked at her—Rachel with doubt, Jackson with eagerness, and Lombard, standing with uncovered head, with grave attention.

"Let us understand this compact clearly," Beatrice said, after some meditation. "If we agree, to what does it bind us?"

"Nothing, except an abatement of your severity toward Jackson," Lombard replied.

"What does he wish?"

"To be met with civility."

"Does he think to become a friend?"

Lombard turned to the railroad man for an answer, and received the sulky reply:

"No."

"One thing," added Miss Elberdean, imperiously, "we do not admit anything which has been charged against us; we have never given aid, direct or indirect, to Bullion Baron. We deny all that has been said which is derogatory to us. For the sake of harmony, however,"—here she rose—"I, for one, will consent to overlook the language we have heard; but it must not occur again. Come, Rachel!"

Lombard bowed gravely.

"The easiest way is always the best, and I think you will never regret this truce."

The girls had already started, and Lombard was not far behind them. He made no effort to keep in their company, but leaving Jackson, went west at a swinging pace.

"Well," observed Beatrice, ironically, "we have been very successful, haven't we? We came out to meet some one, and we met—a vicious nobody."

Rachel sighed, but did not answer until they had crossed Shoglock Brook.

"Beatrice," she then remarked, "Mr. Lombard is a fine-appearing gentleman."

"Is he?"

"Yes, and I think you and he would make a good couple—if you liked him!"

"Far-seeing Rachel! Now, don't trouble your wise little head about such a complicated case!"

Miss Merton accepted the direction as a command, but Emory Lombard continued to drift through her mind at intervals. He had helped them out of a painful situation; she was grateful to him, and she felt that her cousin must feel the same way, even though the fact was not confessed.

When they reached the house they met a man just coming out who was a stranger to them. He had passed the middle line of life and was somewhat gray, while his whole appearance was rather impressive and pleasing.

Entering, they found Mr. Merton in a thoughtful mood. After greeting them, he remained silent for some time. Then he observed:

"We are going to have excitement here."

"In what way?" Beatrice asked.

"I have a new client, and he is going to bring serious charges against one of our foremost men."

"Who is that?"

"Jonas Hutchinson. The stranger makes charges which, if proven, will be Hutchinson's ruin."

"That will not be any great loss to the town."

"As far as Jonas, himself, is concerned, it will not. You know I don't like the man, and never did. He is a miser; he is mean and unscrupulous; he is a usurer. On the other hand, he has done a good deal for Digger's Folly. He is shrewd enough to see that the town's prosperity means prosperity to him, and has acted accordingly; so he has the name, with some, of being public-spirited. He has done all to further his own ends, however."

"What are the charges against him?"

"First, embezzlement; second, assault with intent to kill."

"Serious enough, surely."

"I am not sure that the first can be sustained. It is my client's desire to recover money out of which, he alleges, Hutchinson wronged him. If that fails, the second charge will be made."

"Can he prove that?"

"Probably, although a good lawyer could bother him greatly. He declares that Hutchinson shot him with intent to kill; believed that he was dead; and actually buried him in the lonely place where he fell."

"Tragic enough. Who is your client?"

"Mordaunt Randolph."

"I never heard the name."

"It is new around here."

Merton spoke absently, and then, going to his law-books, began to read them carefully. He appeared to be uncertain on some legal point.

Half an hour later, while the girls were still with him, he had another visitor. Tobias Partridge appeared in an excited frame of mind.

"Say, I've seen a ghost!" he announced.

"A ghost!"

"Sure."

"You see a good many recently."

"This is the same one I seen at the cave."

"Where have you seen it now?"

"He come in ter the hotel, took a room an' signed his name on the big book. 'Twas Mordaunt Randolph; the name was!"

Merton became all attention.

"Do you mean that the man was the same you saw at the cave, wrapped in the white robe?"

"Yes; an' the same critter who announced hisself as a disembodied speerit."

"I don't like that!"

"Nor me. We don't want disembodied speerits around hyar, unless they're in quart flasks, with a corkscrew hung on ter the neck o' the bottle."

"I refer to the fact that he was at the War-Eagle's cave. I want no ally of the road-agent for my client!"

Rachel glanced at Beatrice. She had explained the cave adventure freely to her cousin, but Merton was ignorant of the fact that Gunstock had figured in it. If he doubted Mordaunt Randolph, what would he think of Gunstock?

Unconscious of what was passing in his daughter's mind, the lawyer continued:

"I shall see Randolph again before I commit myself to his cause and case. I am not an overfastidious man, I think, but it would be a great disgrace to get mixed up with Bullion Baron, or any of his hangers-on."

Rachel changed color.

"This varmint may not be an outlaw," suggested Tobias.

"He can be no good. What was he doing in the War-Eagle's cave, if he was not there as a friend? He declined to help you; he must be a black sheep."

Merton and Tobias soon left the house.

"Trouble at every turn!" sighed the lawyer's daughter.

"Don't let this Mordaunt Randolph trouble you."

"He did not look like a villain."

"There are other men who look all right to you, yet they are under suspicion."

"Oh! Beatrice, why are you so implacable toward Dan?"

"Foolish Rachel! I am implacable toward no one, but I see the man Dixon without blinded eyes. I can see no good in him!"

At this point Nero Agrippa appeared.

"Letter foah you, Miss Be'trice," he observed, as he handed out a sealed envelope.

The young lady took it carelessly, and the negro left the room. She did not then notice that it was without post-mark, and did not suspect that it was out of the ordinary line of letters until it was spread before her.

This is what she read:

"MISS ELBERDEAN:—Pardon me for addressing you, but, as my reputation is at stake, I venture to write a few words to you. I think you will remember that I declared my intention of bringing the real Bullion Baron to justice, in order to clear my own name. I think I have a clew now, which is of value, and I hope you will suspend judgment in my case until I have had time to follow it up. If I err in writing this, please forgive one who feels the greatest respect for you, and who, if he can capture the War-Eagle, hopes to win your own esteem in the end."

GUN-STOCK."

Beatrice crushed the letter in her hand.

"The impudent wretch!" she exclaimed.

"What now?" Rachel asked.

"I am tempted not to tell you, for it makes my heart bleed to see you in trouble; but the sooner you get over your fancy for that man Dixon, the better it will be for you. Read!"

She flung the offending letter at Rachel, and the latter hastened to obey the last direction. Her color changed several times while she was occupied thus, but she remained true to her purpose.

"Do you blame him for defending his good name?" she asked, though her voice was faint.

"Why should he write to me?"

"Because it is you who criticises him."

"If he had been an honorable man he would have written to you, his betrothed. What friendly word has he sent to you, anyway?"

"None," Rachel admitted, still more faintly.

"Yet, the scoundrel finds time to write to me."

"But, Beatrice, I am sure he can explain—"

"Disingenuous Rachel! He has had the chance and failed to improve it. Instead, he has persisted in forcing alleged facts—which are only falsehoods—upon me, as though I cared a picayune what became of the insolent creature!"

And Miss Elberdean put her dainty foot upon the offending note and ground it under her heel.

"If he dares annoy me further," she added,

"I will find some person to punish him!"

#### CHAPTER XXVII.

##### DANGER AT MIDNIGHT.

ANOTHER night came.

Tobias Partridge had gone uncomplainingly to the place which had been his bed since Mrs. Grake became an inmate of his house—the floor of the kitchen, with a blanket spread upon it.

He lay awake for some time and meditated upon the rheumatic pain in his right knee—the result of sleeping on the floor—but it was in a spirit of such meekness that he finally fell asleep in a well-satisfied frame of mind, and rested peacefully for several hours.

Midnight came. It found all quiet around the place, even Mrs. Partridge being asleep. Her patient was in such a favorable condition that this did not seem rash.

Soon after the birth of the new day there were noises outside which were not of a reassuring nature. Stealthy footsteps sounded, but were not heard by the inmates of the house.

A man came to the window and peered in. The fire had died out almost wholly, and he could see but little. Perchance he could dimly distinguish Tobias, but all things went to show that no danger existed there.

Slowly the man raised the window.

Then followed a long pause, but two or three heads were to be seen outside, and they were busy. Something was placed under the window

and then one began to crawl through. It was not hard work, and he was soon in the kitchen. A second and a third followed, but Tobias still slept on.

The slide of a dark-lantern was drawn, and the room looked over quickly and quietly.

If Tobias had been awake he would have seen two stout, brutal-looking men who were strangers to him; the third he would have recognized as Jonas Hutchinson.

"Better let us do for him!" suggested one of the strangers, indicating Tobias.

"No, no!" Jonas replied. "I don't want anything done that may bring the law on me, though the fellow deserves it."

He was thinking how the ex-miner had deserted him on Mount Nibbletoe; how he had dug in the Bear-Man's hut until wearied out, and dug all in vain; how he had given Partridge a part of his secret without getting any return.

He was angry at Tobias, but dared not seek revenge.

The money-lender pointed to the inner room.

"Go in!" he added; "she is there!"

The ruffian with the dark-lantern obeyed and disappeared, but soon returned.

"Which is the woman we want?" he asked.

"Can't you tell?" whispered Jonas, peevishly.

"No. Go, you, and pick her out!"

He thrust the lantern into Hutchinson's hand, and pushed him toward the door. The miser was very reluctant to go; in fact, he was so terrified that he would have given up the whole plan had he not been aware that he would have to pay his men, in any case.

After some hesitation he took the lantern, but it shook in his hand. He had stipulated that no one should be harmed, but he had an unpleasant conviction that his allies would shed blood if capture confronted them.

Advancing to the door of the second room, he was reassured by heavy breathing. He entered. Then he slowly moved the slide of the lantern and let out the light.

He was so near the bed that he started back in alarm. Then he stared breathlessly.

Two women lay upon the bed—Polly Partridge and Mrs. Grake. The former had thrown the bed-covering over her, and it was not wholly strange that Hutchinson's ally had been in doubt.

As for Jonas, he saw only Rosamond Grake. She lay very quiet, and with closed eyes. There was a feverish flush to her face which was not deeper than the common hue of many persons, so she looked natural.

Jonas gazed spell-bound.

It was the same woman who had come to his own chamber with Dusky Dan, and robbed him of his gold; but it was not of that he thought then. Miser though he was, his thoughts went back to a time when he had an object in life rather than the gathering of gold. He had known her, and had thought to share his wealth with her willingly. Despite this passion he was a miser then, as always, and her life would have been wretched with him, but he did not realize this.

Years had gone. This fever-flushed woman was the one he had loved, but time had changed them both.

She had robbed him of his gold—and, he suspected, had been robbed promptly in turn herself—but he feared another stroke.

As a measure of safety, he intended to abduct her.

All this was forgotten as he gazed at her. He thought, but not clearly. He could not have explained what was in his mind; he gazed like one fascinated.

That careworn face moved him strongly.

At last he aroused. Both Mrs. Grake and Polly were sleeping soundly, and it did not seem hard to get the former away. His allies intended to chloroform both, and so avert danger.

He expected that it would kill Rosamond to take her away, but he dared not have her recover her senses there. Perhaps she did not know who had robbed her.

If this was true, would she not naturally suspect him? Being again poor, would she not, in any case, proceed against him?

He dared not leave her to recover.

Shaking off his spell-bound mood, he turned and carefully left the room.

"Take the one with the bandaged head," he whispered to his allies.

Just then a pebble went bounding across the floor, as though flung in through the window, and ended its flight by striking Tobias full in the stomach. He had been sleeping restlessly ever since the intruders came, and this was enough to awaken him entirely.

He sat up quickly, and then a voice sounded at the window.

"Stir yourself, Tobias! Murderers are in your house!"

Consternation seized the intruders. They knew they were detected, and they made a rush for safety. The first to reach the window bounded through, but, as he touched the ground, a heavy blow felled him to the earth.

Number two followed and met with the same fate.

Jonas was last, his age being against him, but he met with a different reception. He was half out of the window when a lantern was swung around almost into his face, and making that part of his anatomy perfectly distinct.

"Hello! so it's *you*, you old villain?" cried a voice at his elbow.

Startled afresh, the money-lender fell out of the window and alighted heavily, and in a heap, on the ground. Almost instantly he found the toe of a boot applied to him with such vigor and good aim that he writhed with pain.

"Mercy! mercy!" he gasped.

"Accept my compliments," retorted the unknown, and he still used his boot forcibly.

Tobias appeared at the window.

"What in 'tarnal wildcats is up?" the ex-miner demanded.

"This man is *down*," returned the rescuer.

"Who is he?"

"A knave and thief."

"Oh, Mr. Partridge," groaned Jonas, "it is a mistake—all a mistake!"

"Hullo! 'tis you, hey?" cried Tobias. "Now, don't yer try ter lie out on't, fur I hev ye dead ter rights."

"These knaves are going," exclaimed the rescuer, whose sharp eyes had seen that Hutchinson's allies were trying to creep away secretly.

"Let 'em go, an' their master with 'em. Jonas, you lift yer hoofs an' skip!"

"Is that wise?" asked the rescuer, doubtfully.

"It is, fur I know Jonas an' his way. Ef he tries ter ride rusty ag'in, I'll hev him arrested, by ther jumpin' painters o' the Rockies!"

The baffled kidnappers were glad to go, and they went without ceremony. Jonas, alone, would have remained to smooth over the case, but Tobias gave a threat which caused him to follow his tools. The rescuer shook his head gravely.

"You should have put them in prison," he observed.

"No fear o' them; their game is out o' the bag like a cat, an' they won't dare ter kick up no more high-jinks."

"Their object was to abduct some woman here; this I learned by listening."

"They didn't git her, an' now I know how des'prit they be, they won't. But look a hyar-yer voice is familiar; who be I talkin' with?"

The stranger's face had been well concealed with a slouch hat and a muffler. He now laughed, sprung in through the window, and answered:

"Provide means of secrecy, and you shall see, worthy Tobias!"

As he spoke he lowered both the window and the curtain, and, when Tobias had made a light, the visitor stood revealed.

"Dan Dixon," the ex-miner exclaimed.

The younger man possessed himself of the speaker's hand and shook it heartily.

"Yes, old friend, it is I, back again," he replied. "Come, why don't you welcome a man you haven't met for many a day?"

"It's less than twenty-four hours," ungraciously reminded Tobias.

"Pray, where did you see me then?"

"At Bullion Baron's cave."

"You're crazy, man! You haven't seen me in weeks!"

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

##### "FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD."

TOBIAS regarded his companion sulkily.

"You're still at it, I see," he grumbled.

"To what do you object?" Dixon asked.

"Considerin' what we went through, last night, your denials don't please me."

"You say you saw me at Bullion Baron's cave. You may admit that you were there, but I won't!"

"Didn't we rescue a sartain feminine, an' guide her back home?"

"Most decidedly, we did not!"

"Dan Dixon, I don't see no sense in the way you act!" asserted Tobias, warmly. "Mebbe you deny that you was under arrest at City Hall?"

"I do deny it, emphatically. Come, Partridge, you and I trained together so long that you ought not to be any blinder than a bat. I have heard of my double, the man who got arrested as the War-Eagle—and, I presume, very justly. But, man alive, do you mean to say you can't tell me from him?"

There was an indignant ring to the questioner's voice, but it did not affect the hearer.

"I don't see no sense in yer antics, Dan," the ex-miner growled. "By the way, I s'pose you deny that you be Dan?"

"Did you ever know me to deny my name?"

"Many a time."

"Look here, old man, you deserve a trouncing if ever man did, and only our friendship of the past saves you. Of the past! Yes, that's about it; I reckon it is all over with, for I can't be a friend to any one who questions my veracity."

"Then you don't want ter be called Gun-stock now, hev?"

"Absurd! You know perfectly well that no white man was ever given such a name as 'Gun-stock.' The West teems with queer names, self-assumed, but I want no part of

them; I am not named Gun stock, never was and never claimed to be."

Tobias shook his head in silence.

"I have heard that my double desires to sail under that *alias*, and he can do so to his heart's content; but my friends ought not to be deceived. You knew me for months, miner. Do you intend to say that this Gun-stock really resembles me so much that you cannot tell us apart?"

"Ridic'lous as the question is, I'll answer it as 'tis put. Yes!"

"Then he is a most dangerous man, and may do me great harm," Dixon gravely declared. "He can ruin me by lawless acts, all of which will fall to my credit, as I once lived here."

Tobias maintained sulky silence.

"Clearly," added Dixon, "I must find and capture this man to prove my innocence!"

"Oh! Ah! Indeed! An' he wants ter capture Bullion Baron ter prove *his* innocence!"

"He does, eh?" was the sharp response. "Tobias, you can set one thing down as a fact—Gun-stock is Bullion Baron himself!"

"Think so?" returned Mr. Partridge, with sarcasm.

"I do. More than that, the scoundrel is playing some desperate game, even worse than his exploits as the War-Eagle. He has learned of his resemblance to me, and is trying to make capital out of it. What his scheme is, I don't know, but he would not assert that he was Dan Dixon without some deep plot in mind."

"But Gun-stock declares he is not Daniel Dixon!"

"The dickens he does."

"He denies it all the time."

"Then there is something stranger than ever to it; but he can well afford to deny it, if the resemblance is so strong. The scheme remains, and I repeat that he is Bullion Baron. More than this, I propose to capture Mr. Gun-stock, and let men see us together."

Tobias smiled grimly.

"I hope you'll find him."

"I shall, for there is no safety for me until it is done. Suspicion's finger has been leveled at me, and if I appear here openly, I shall be arrested for Bullion Baron. There are reasons why I might find it hard to prove my innocence."

Mr. Partridge's sarcastic smile broadened. He thought Dixon's last statement the most veracious that he had made.

"Thus you will see that I am an exile from Digger's Folly. Were I to appear here I should be arrested at once, and my best friends have either turned against me, or are in doubt. Not an enviable position for a man to be placed in, surely. But let me not talk solely of myself. What is the matter with old Jonas Hutchinson? Why does he want to steal the woman who is with you?"

"Don' know."

"Who is she?"

"A woman sick with fever. Her clothes are marked, an' seem ter tell what her tongue ain't told—that her name is Grake."

Polly Partridge advanced from the inner room where she had been listening.

"I'm a woman o' few words," she announced, "but that is doin's an' carryin's on that make my blood b'ile like seethin' layver. Ef peace has fled from this town, I'm a goin', too. Mr. Dixon, I thank ye hearty fur savin' on us, an' so would my patient, ef the poor, dear angel was inter her right mind. You'd ought ter see the poor lamb, but she ain't able ter receive visitors nohow; an' this epplesode has excited her prodigious. I don't keer ef you be Bullion Baron, fur you hev rescued us all, an' kep' us from bein' borne away inter captivity like dumb beasts ter the slaughter. While woman continues beautiful ter gaze upon, she's bound ter be abductionized by mean critters, an' I'd hate that like sixty. Thar'fore, Mr. C., we thank ye hearty. Them is my sentiments, briefly expressed. Good-night."

This flood of words had been delivered while bony Mrs. Partridge stood in a defiant attitude, like Ajax of old; it gave no one else a chance to say a word; but at the conclusion the apostle of brevity retreated to the inner room.

Dixon was not disposed to linger.

There was no safety for him at Digger's Folly, he explained, and his home must be made in the wild hills until he had proved that he was neither Gun-stock nor Bullion Baron: but he could not rest content until he had seen Tobias and asked him to suspend judgment.

"Can't you send fur yer old friends an' prove yer good character?" asked the ex-miner.

"I don't wish to do that."

"Whar is yer old home, anyhow?"

"Excuse me, but just at present I must decline to give any information as to my past life."

Tobias's eyes twinkled. Almost in the same words had "Gun-stock" declined when he was a prisoner at City Hall.

The old miner wondered at the man's audacity. He seemed to think that everybody else was so weak-minded that they could be deceived at his will.

The arch-offender did not remain much longer. After an earnest request to Tobias that he would

not condemn him until the end was reached, Dixon left the house.

After watching him hurry away through the darkness, Partridge closed up the house and sat down, revolver in hand, to pass the remainder of the night on guard.

Since Hutchinson's visit to Polly, a few days before, it had been certain that he was Mrs. Grake's enemy, and the attack did not surprise Tobias, though he could not see what interest the money-lender had in the sick woman.

One thing was certain, however—if he and his tools came again, they would meet with a warm reception.

"The way ain't half so clear fur Rachel Merton," the worthy man murmured. "She's in love with Bullion Baron, an' the sooner she treads that love under her heel, the sooner she'll bruise a serpent's head. Dan may deny, squirm, lie an' quibble, but facts is stubborn things!"

In the meanwhile the prospector had gone on in a direct course. He did not see that he had any reason to fear; unless he again met Jonas and his tools he was not likely to encounter any one at that hour, and he was prepared to deal vigorously with whoever might molest him.

His course took him to the public square, and there he chanced to observe a placard nailed to the wall of the City Hall.

Suspecting what it was he determined to have a look at it. He had retained the lantern secured from Jonas Hutchinson's party, but had turned the wick so low down that it gave no light. He now turned it higher, and the placard became visible. It read as follow:

#### "Five Hundred Dollars Reward!"

"The above sum will be paid for the capture of Daniel Dixon, alias 'Bullion Baron,' the notorious outlaw. This person has so long been the terror of Danger Divide, that it is the duty of every man to exert himself to the utmost, not for the reward alone, but for the peace and prosperity of the towns along the Divide. Printed hand-bills describing the road-agent will be furnished on application after to-day.

H. WILLIAMS, Sheriff."

Dixon smiled bitterly.

"That's a pretty document for an honest man to read, and see his name at the head. Once I could go and come here freely, but it can't be done while those documents paper the walls. I'll do away with one, at least!"

He reached up to tear the placard down, but as he did so, a hand was clapped upon his shoulder, and a determined voice sounded in his ear: "Bullion Baron, you are my prisoner!"

#### CHAPTER XXIX.

##### THE BLOW OF A STRONG ARM.

DAN DIXON turned quickly and confronted the speaker. If he thought anything about his lantern he did not heed the fact that, despite his slouch hat and muffler, it would betray his identity; he thought only of the second man, and the light gave him all the information necessary.

He stood face to face with Lewis Jackson.

There was an interval of silence, and if a third party had been there, the pause would have seemed interesting. If Rachel Merton had been present she would have seen—or, at least, so she would have believed—the two men who had been rivals for her hand.

Jackson broke the silence.

"You are my prisoner, and I claim that reward!"

He pointed to the placard with one hand, and held a revolver with the other.

"Allow me to inquire," retorted Dan, with perfect coolness, "what brand of liquor you drink, and how much you have taken?"

"You evade the point."

"What is the point?"

"You are my prisoner."

"I deny it."

"Do you refuse to surrender?"

"I do, most certainly."

"There is nothing like a frank understanding, and I am much obliged for the information. You say you won't surrender; I say you shall. I shall enforce my assertion with this weapon!"

He held the revolver higher, and tapped it significantly with his free hand.

"What do you care about the matter?" quietly asked the prospector.

"Bullion Baron is a public scourge; he should be arrested."

"When you give that as your motive, you act the liar. From the first you have hated me; you know the reason well enough."

"Perhaps you will tell me?"

"I hesitate to drag the name into this conversation, but it was all on account of Rachel Merton. You aspired to win her hand, and, when you saw me in her company, you hated me for it. I believe that all the odium now attached to my name is due to you."

"I think I am justified in interfering when a notorious outlaw comes here, assuming to be an honest man, and seeks to win one of our women. At any rate, I am willing to admit all enmity to you, Mr. Bullion Baron."

"I am not Bullion Baron!"

"Can you prove it?"

"At present, I shall not try."

"Will you go into court again as a clown?"

"I am not going into court; I am not going to be arrested, as you call it!"

"Will you resist?"

"Certainly, I shall."

"Then I'll blow your head off!"

"Softly, Mr. Jackson! Shooting is a game at which two can play, and I shall not hesitate to do my share. Keep off, or you will be sorry for it!"

The men still confronted each other, hostility expressed in every expression, glance and tone. Both were wary. Jackson held the revolver firmly, watching to see that Dan Dixon did not draw a similar weapon. This the latter made no attempt to do, but he was equally alert.

Jackson's enmity knew no bounds. He felt that Dixon must die before he could accomplish his own ends, and was not reluctant to be the cause of his death. He was considering whether he probably would be believed if he should shoot him down in the square and assert that his foe had been the aggressor.

"Are you aware?" he asked, in a low voice, "that you are in the heart of the town?"

"Yes; and I am also aware that you and I are the only ones astir."

"Suppose I raise my voice and summon aid?"

"Do it if you wish."

"Or will you surrender peaceably?"

"For the last time, I will not surrender!"

Jackson leveled his revolver at his rival's breast.

"March to the jail, or I will shoot you!" he declared, with determination.

Young Dixon's nostrils dilated with a sudden flash of scorn. He acted like one who felt the situation to be wholly in his favor, but he did not move or make answer.

"My revolver," added Jackson, "is the keeper of your life, while you have no weapon."

"Yet, I am the master here!"

"Fool! why do you make this delay?"

"Perhaps it does not seem the right thing to you, so I will show you why you can't take me to jail. There is nothing like a convincing argument!"

All this while Dixon had been holding his lantern well up, affording his rival ample light by which to watch and see that no attempt was made to wrest the advantage from him.

As the last words were spoken, however, the prospector suddenly swung the lantern higher, and then, with a swift sweep, brought it down forcibly on Jackson's head, the whole being done too rapidly to give the latter time to comprehend what was coming.

There was a rattling of glass, and Jackson sunk to the ground.

He was in a state of bewilderment. He suffered alike from surprise and the blow, and yet retained sense enough to know that he ought to move promptly to save his case. He was a long while in getting up, however, for he floundered around aimlessly for awhile.

When he did get upon his feet, Dan Dixon had disappeared.

The vanquished man put his hand to his head and took it away stained with blood. The hurt was only slight, but it added force to his defeat.

The lantern had been broken into many pieces, and it was a wonder that he had not been severely cut. As it was, he was dazed and uncertain, and held his hands to his head and tried to think clearly.

He made no pursuit. Even then he realized that Dixon had a good start, and that there was no knowing which way he had gone, and the railroad-agent took his defeat as calmly as possible.

After awhile his head cleared, and then anger took the place of bewilderment. He stuck the placard on the wall as though it had been his rival, and seemed to find some satisfaction in that.

"Curse him!" he hissed; "I'll have the scoundrel yet. He has stacked up against the wrong man, and I'll humble and ruin him. I am not the man to lose what I play for, and either Rachel shall be my wife or a gravestone shall mark the spot where the chase ends. We'll see, in the future, whose name goes on the stone!"

He was preparing to leave the place when footsteps sounded close at hand.

Had Dan returned?

The thought caused Jackson to look around hurriedly for his revolver, which he had forgotten. He found it on the ground, and, straightening up, saw the nocturnal walker, but not Dixon.

Instead, he thought at first that it was a bear, for he could make out the shaggy hide, but the creature stood erect, and further survey showed it to be a man, like himself, though curiously garbed.

The Bear-Man had come to a halt, and was surveying Jackson with close attention.

"Well," said the latter, sharply, "who the dickens are you?"

"Your brother," was the answer.

"Indeed! I feel honored, but don't see the point."

"My skin is black, and my body shaggy," added the Bear-Man, "but we see and think alike. You hate Bullion Baron, and so do I!"

"How do you know that?"

"You struck the placard which has his name."

"Humph! Well, what next?"

"I can guide you to the outlaw's cave."

"Ha! that is more to the point. Where is it?"

"There!" and the Bear-Man made a sweeping gesture which might have taken in all of Danger Divide. "I follow him many days. I build a hut in the mountains, and live like a dog on roots and game which I snare. Always I think of Bullion Baron, and long to kill him, and I search—search. Finally I learn that he has a temporary cave on Mount Nibbletoe, but there is a chasm which I cannot cross. So I dig me poisonous herbs, and brew a mixture I know is sure death; and I pour it in the water the War-Eagle must drink; but some way he escapes. The water-spout is torn down, and he leaves the cave and goes about freely."

Jackson has listened eagerly.

"Is this all true?" he asked.

"Have I not said so?"

"But if Bullion Baron has left his cave, how can you find him?"

"I know of his main cave; I have found it after much search; but it is hard to enter, and I want one man to help me."

"Why do you hate the man?"

"He has robbed me."

Jackson glanced at the bear-robe.

"Of what?"

"Money!—gold! We had it in a bag, my mistress and I; but he strikes us both down—perhaps he kills my mistress. I cannot find her. Poor Madam Grake!"

The Bear-Man heaved a deep sigh not to be expected from one clad like himself, while Jackson gave a start of fresh interest.

#### CHAPTER XXX.

##### DUSKY DAN'S GHOST.

"So you know Mrs. Grake?" Jackson asked.

"She is my mistress," the negro replied.

"Does she live near here?"

"She has no home."

"How did she come to be here?"

"She and I came to see a man. We got money from him, but Bullion Baron met us near Shoglock Brook and knocked me down. He stole the gold, and did something with my mistress; I don't know what. I was badly wounded, and, most of the time, my head has been wrong. Where I got the bear-robe I wear I don't know; I found it on myself after one of my crazy spells."

"How do you know you were robbed by Bullion Baron?"

"He said that was who he was, and he was dressed that way, too; he wore the eagle on his head. I have sworn to be revenged, and I will be. I know where his cave is, and I am going to have back the money he stole, and capture him. You ought to help me."

"Why?"

"Because you hate the man who was a prisoner at City Hall—Mrs. Grake and I had just arrived then, and I saw that man—and I think he is the War-Eagle."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because I've seen him around the outlaw's home."

"Ha!—that is great news!"

"Are you with me?"

"You say you know where his cave is?"

"Yes."

"And will guide me there?"

"Yes."

"Then, by my life, I am with you. I would give all I am worth to have the pleasure of bringing that fellow to justice. I feel sure it is Dan Dixon, and I have good reasons for hating him. Look at my hand! It is red with blood—my blood—and I got the hurt by being felled to the earth by him. It was a cowardly blow, and he shall pay dearly for it."

Jackson spoke as venomously as though he had not been holding a revolver to his rival's breast at the time he received the blow, and really felt himself a deeply-misused man.

The interview lasted for some time longer, and Jackson endeavored to learn more about the cave. He could not do this, however; the Bear-Man—or Dusky Dan, to return to his name—could only tell that it was about three miles north of Mount Nibbletoe.

He had held some thoughts of working on his own responsibility, but now concluded that he would have to take the negro for a partner, and arrangements were made for an expedition.

If he could capture the War-Eagle he was willing to do it under any condition.

Next, he tried to get more light in regard to Mrs. Grake, in whose case he was interested, but Dusky Dan suddenly grew cautious, and would tell nothing. The negro had nearly recovered from his injuries, and was proceeding coherently, but the fact that he was living in his hut outside the village cut him off from knowledge of what was being done there.

He was also ignorant of the fact that he was forming an alliance with a villain.

When he left Jackson he crossed through the village. If he had possessed money he would soon have been clothed like other men, and have taken up his quarters at the village; but he was

penniless, and did not think of asking any one to help him financially.

His steps took him near the hotel. At this point there was always light, for the landlord had two large lamps suspended from the piazza, and they were kept burning all night.

All this recalled to Dusky Dan the fact that he had not had any desirable food for a long time. He was hungry, and, impelled by the hope that something might have been left where he could get it, he made a circuit of the house.

He found no food, but, as he once more came around in front, he saw something which produced an effect upon him even greater.

The piazza was no longer untenanted.

Near one of the supporting columns was a figure, and, as far as he could see, it was clad all in white. He stopped short, and his eyes grew large and startled.

He beheld the same object he had seen at the road-agent's cave, and which had caused him to flee then in such hot haste. He had taken supernatural views of the creature. Seen by practical eyes, as it stood on the piazza, it was a man somewhat past middle age, but Dusky Dan did not so regard it.

He saw the pale face and white-clad body, and he uttered a startled exclamation:

"Great heavens!—again, again! It is my old master's ghost!"

So declaring, he turned and fled in the darkness like a modern Tam O'Shanter, minus a horse, and did not pause until he had put the village between himself and the "ghost."

That creature, unconscious of the consternation he had caused, remained motionless for some time, gazing out into the darkness. Then he sighed heavily, turned and re-entered the hotel through a window.

It was the man who had registered as Mordaunt Randolph. He had been restless, and had put on his trowsers, only, and g'ne out to enjoy the air. His white shirt had made him look ghostly to superstitious Dusky Dan, but he was hardly of phantom order.

Reaching his room he sat down at a table and leaned his head upon his hand.

"Old memories are strong, to-night," he murmured. "I don't know why I think so much of the happier half of my life. Heaven knows there has been but little in the later half to remind me of the days when there was sunshine in the world for me; but it comes over me strongly, somehow!"

Unable to remain quiet, he rose and began to pace the room with quick, excited steps.

Since reaching Digger's Folly, the fact that he was so near the man who had ruined his life had acted strongly upon him. Once, he had thought to settle with Jonas Hutchinson as Jonas had tried to settle with him, and to use his revolver.

The lawless impulse had been controlled only with a strong effort, and it had been necessary to renew the fight after he arrived at the town.

It stirred him deeply to be near Hutchinson, and yet wait the slow course of law.

The sound of voices interrupted his meditations. Not caring to be seen, and well aware that the darkness of his room afforded security, he drew close to the window and looked out.

Two men were standing on the well-lighted piazza, and he had no trouble in recognizing them. One was Lewis Jackson; the other was a second boarder at the hotel.

"Affairs never looked so well before," Jackson was saying. "I really believe that the negro will show me Bullion Baron's cave."

"How did he find it?"

"He has been following the War-Eagle, and hunting persistently, since he was robbed by the outlaw," Jackson replied.

"Other men have hunted."

"True; but it was left for this humble fellow to make the success. Things often happen so."

"Well, what do you intend to do?"

"First, I want you to join the negro and me in our attempt to capture the man."

"I haven't much faith in it, Jackson."

"Isn't it worth trying?"

"Possibly."

"Humble as my new friend is, I think he can do just as he claims."

"Well, suppose we should capture the War-Eagle, don't we lose our grip on the girls thereby?"

"Not if my plan is followed. I don't advise running Dixon to jail and saying, 'Here's Bullion Baron; give us five hundred dollars!' Quite the contrary. Let us seize the fellow and hold him prisoner, somewhere, and then put in our demands. Rachel Merton has no more sand than a mouse, and I'm sure she can be scared into marrying me."

"Beatrice isn't built that way."

"Oh! she'll come around."

"Jackson, I am not in favor of your scheme."

"No?"

"I am not, but I'll give you an idea. I think I see here a better plan for getting the girls under our thumb. As you arranged it before, something *might* come of it, but that's very doubtful. You hold over them a certain secret, but it isn't half so strong as you think. Suppose they did help Bullion Baron to get away. Don't you suppose that Ben Merton would overlook it,

if they dropped a few wily feminine tears on his coat collar?"

"Very likely, but you can bet they don't want the secret known."

"True, but they know they have nothing to fear."

"What do you advise?"

"That we get them into a more serious complication."

"How can we do it?"

"They have rescued the War-Eagle once; make them stir themselves to do it again, and have a hue and cry raised. Let them be absent from Digger's Folly; let their reputations be at stake; let all the townspeople be on their tiptoes with curiosity; then let us stand as the sole rock of refuge!"

"Can that be done?" Jackson asked, eagerly.

"It can be tried."

"How?"

"Come to my room, and let us talk it over."

They walked away, leaving Randolph alone.

"A precious pair of knaves!" he muttered. "By heavens! I ought to foil their plots, and I will!"

### CHAPTER XXXI.

#### BULLION BARON BECOMES ACTIVE.

RANDOLPH made a light, and sitting down at the table, devoted his time for nearly an hour to looking over his private papers. Then he arose, dressed fully and left the hotel.

His life had been one of deep trouble, and it had made him restless and uneasy. At times he could not sleep, and when he was in such a mood he rarely made the attempt.

He did not see how he was to get any happiness on the worldly side of the grave, but he did look forward to the time when he would have legal satisfaction from Jonas Hutchinson.

After that he felt sure he could settle down in peace, if not in happiness.

Leaving the hotel he walked slowly away toward the west. Mount Nibbletoe reared its barren top high in the air in advance, and he was tempted to go as far as there. But he had heard of its chasms and pitfalls, and so refrained.

He would not have been left to his choice in any case.

Almost as soon as he started from the hotel he had a spy upon his track. A man had come out of the shadows, and he fell in behind the old gentleman and followed silently and carefully.

A hundred yards away he suddenly abandoned his direct course, and flitted away to the shadow of a building. There he found two other men in waiting.

"Say, our game is out!" he announced.

"Who?" was the surprised reply, in a voice which was surely Jonas Hutchinson's.

"Randolph."

"Where is he?"

"Prowlin' around. He left the hotel, an' has jest gone by. Ef we want him, now's the time!"

"We do want him, by Cain!" declared Jonas. "If we can't succeed in one case, we may be able to in another."

The late trailer felt of his head.

"Say!" he groaned, "ef I ever find out who hit me over the head, I'll kill the demon. I b'lieve my skull is broke!"

"So's mine, an' the woman is still safe at Partridge's," added the third man.

"Never mind," continued Jonas; "if we can get Randolph, it'll be a big haul. Luck seems likely to favor us; that old man can't resist two such stout fellows as you."

"The unknown may bob up ag'in, and slap us over the head."

"We'll do the 'slappin'' this time. What say, Hutch; do we gobble him now?"

"Yes."

"Then, come on!"

The three man-hunters hastened away in pursuit. It was not difficult to overtake Randolph, for his progress had been slow and aimless; and they soon had him in sight.

"You go ahead, Hutch, an' bring him up with a short turn, an' we'll take him while his surprise is on," suggested one of the roughs.

Possibly this was a good plan, but it did not so command itself to Jonas. He would have faced a grizzly bear almost as willingly as Mordaunt Randolph. He refused to consider the offer useful, and the trio advanced upon Randolph from the rear.

The latter was just leaving the last of the houses of the town, and the chances of taking him by surprise would lessen if he passed them. They hurried to the attack.

Randolph did not notice the quick, stealthy steps behind him, and the foremost man raised the club he carried.

He did not strike the blow. Instead, there was a rustling at one side, in the shadow of a building, and the rough went down under a blow even more weighty than he had planned to make his own. His comrade was surprised, and, before he could recover from his bewilderment, a dark figure sprung at him and knocked him down beside of Number One.

Jonas alone remained standing; but, great as his alarm was, he could not take to his heels.

For the second time his plans had miscarried, and he was seeing his tools knocked around like ten-pins.

"It was his turn next, and he received no favor. The club was swung aloft again, and it laid Jonas low.

His allies were trying to clear their bewildered minds and get upon their feet, but a few more blows, impartially bestowed, quelled all such desires and left the three scoundrels prone and badly used up.

Randolph had been looking on in amazement, but the rescuer now advanced toward him quickly.

"Well, old gent, you're out of that racket," he bluffly observed.

"If I understand the case, they were going to assault me?"

"Correct."

"Then I owe you a good deal—"

The rescuer laughed shortly.

"Don't mention it!"

"But I am not ungrateful—"

"Do you know who I am?" the rescuer demanded.

"No."

"Do you see how I am rigged out? Observe the mimic eagle that perches on my head!"

Randolph started.

"Can it be you are—"

He hesitated, and the rescuer calmly replied: "I am Bullion Baron!"

Randolph did not doubt the statement. He could see the mimic eagle plainly, now that his attention was called to it. The situation was fast becoming interesting.

"In that case," he made response, "I am sure you are not so black as you are painted."

Again the War-Eagle laughed shortly.

"So men speak ill of me?"

"Frankly, they do."

"Cæsar, Alexander, Wellington, Napoleon—each had his enemies."

"True."

"But, despite my evil name, you don't think I would do a mean deed, eh?"

"You certainly have acted nobly toward me," Randolph returned, guardedly.

"Exactly; but let us speak aside where these knaves will not hear us. All three are now insensible, I'll be sworn; but they will come around later. Their broken heads might not keep them from acting the listener, and any one at Digger's Folly would jump at the chance to aim a kick at Bullion Baron."

"Count me out, sir! You have aided me generously, and I'm not an ungrateful man. I've heard a good deal of talk about you, but I don't live here; and I see no reason why I should feel bitter enmity toward you. On the other hand, you've saved me from my foes. Consider me your friend, Sir Road-Agent!"

"Thanks; I will. I tell you, old man, I'm not half a bad fellow. Am a bit wild, maybe, and have a strange fancy for other men's gold, but I'm naturally a free-hearted, jovial, hospitable fellow. Here's a taste of my hospitality!"

One of his hands rose quickly, and he pressed a revolver against Randolph's temple.

"You are my prisoner!" he added, coolly. "Come to my cave, and I will entertain you there!"

Randolph was startled, but he could hardly believe that the man was not joking.

"Are you in earnest?" he answered.

"I am. You are to go to the cave."

"But, what do you want with me?"

"Never mind. That part is of no consequence. All you have to do is to obey."

"But, sir, this is not what your former conduct led me to expect."

"It makes no difference, but I will tell you frankly that I wrested you away from the other men because I wanted you myself. I have no explanation to make now, further than to say that your life is safe. Now, turn your face northwest and march!"

"But I protest—"

"I don't care a rap if you do; you'll have to obey just the same. Go on!"

"If you want money, you can have all I've got about me at present."

"Hang your money! It is you I want, and I am going to have you. Now, will you go, or shall I use my revolver on you?"

Randolph hesitated, and then reluctantly replied:

"I am in your power, and have no choice but to obey!"

"Now, you act sensibly. March!"

Randolph obeyed. Outlaw the War-Eagle might be, but the prisoner did not feel that he need have any fears of meeting with violence at his hands. What motive actuated his captor was not clear, but he was likely to learn.

Followed by Bullion Baron and menaced with the revolver, Randolph walked out of the town and along Rolling Trail.

"I hope it isn't a long walk, Mr. Dixon," remarked the captive, experimentally.

"So you call me Dixon, too! Now, I don't see any good reasons for associating two names. I am barred out of Digger's Folly by my fondness for gold, in the form of bullion, nugget and dust, but why brand me Dixon?"

"Do you deny that you are he?"

"Sir, I am not at the confessional. Suppose we drop Dixon, who is an innocent fellow and a good fellow, and attend strictly to our own business."

Randolph did not reply. He felt no great interest in Daniel Dixon, and had merely listened in an absent way to the village gossips. It concerned him but little who Bullion Baron was; the fact remained that he was the outlaw's prisoner.

So they marched on along Rolling Trail, going deeper and deeper into the mountain, until the prisoner was thoroughly weary.

Little did he suspect to what strange experiences he was going.

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### A GALLANT OUTLAW.

The following note was received by Beatrice just after supper the next evening:

"MISS ELBERDEAN:—These presents is ter inform you that i wude like 2 O you north ov Shoglock broke bridg' az sone az konvenent, az i hav news ov valleu 2 U. Don't fale in this, and i wun't keap you Butt A Few minnits. Bring Rachel.

"Respecktly yores,

"T. PARTRIDGE, Esq."

The note was not easy to read, for the writing was about as bad as the spelling, but Beatrice deciphered it without any great difficulty.

"I cannot imagine why he should summon us there, instead of coming here," remarked the young lady, with a critical air.

"Perhaps he has news of—"

Thus far spoke Rachel, and then she stopped short, blushed and looked confused.

"Of whom?" asked Miss Elberdean, severely.

"I don't know," Rachel faltered.

"Don't you? Foolish Rachel! you are so shallow and transparent that I wonder you dare to evade me. You are thinking of that man Dixon?"

"Yes," confessed Miss Merton, meekly.

"You weary me, child; you weary me greatly; but it shall never be said that I desert you in your hour of trouble. If there is news of the man Dixon, it is ill news."

"How do you know?"

"Because there never will be anything good to tell concerning him. Rocks do not produce fertile grain in this generation."

Beatrice thought of the letter which the man of her aversion had dared to write, and frowned in a very becoming manner. With her inclination to practical ideas, and all her severity of speech, it was impossible for her to make herself offensive. Where she had no prejudice she was always womanly, and even when she was critical she retained a manner charming enough to invite admiration.

There was a long silence, and then Rachel timidly asked:

"Are we going?"

"You hope to get news of the man Dixon. I warn you that you will hear no good news of him, but the sooner you have your eyes opened, the better. Yes; we will go!"

Rachel's face brightened. Beatrice arose, looked out and saw that the sun had sunk behind Mount Nibbletoe. If they were to go, it was advisable to lose no time. She threw on a light hat, and Rachel followed her example; they left the house.

Glancing at Rachel's face, Beatrice saw that it was bright with anticipation. Half-unconsciously the stronger-minded girl sighed. She was not surprised, but she was troubled to see that past events had not served to shake her cousin's faith. Rachel was not one of the logical few, but one of the army of her sisters who keep their faith in those they love through doubt, sorrow, poverty and all the kindred evils that so soon destroy a weaker love than woman's.

As Miss Elberdean noticed the fast-gathering shadows she hoped that the designated place of meeting, "north of Shoglock Brook bridge," would not prove to be far away.

The bush-grown area, and the rocks beyond, did not furnish a spot where she cared to be, after dark, in such days as had fallen upon the mountain town.

When the brook was reached there was no sign of Tobias. They crossed to the further end of the bridge, and there Beatrice paused and glanced ahead. The bushes looked forbidding to her.

"Mr. Partridge must come to us; we go no further," she announced.

"But he may not see," Rachel urged.

"It is his business to see us."

"We might go a short distance—"

"I decline; I am not going to run into any trap."

For the first time it occurred to her that there might be something wrong about the letter. Tobias had never before hesitated to come to Benjamin Merton's house when he had business.

A footstep sounded on the bridge.

Beatrice turned quickly.

A man was crossing behind them—a roughly-dressed, rumpled-looking person whom she never had seen before. Somehow, his appearance gave her fresh uneasiness, and, as though he must move to enable him to cross, she hurried to leave the bridge.

This movement brought a smile to her face, and he suddenly whistled softly. Al-

most immediately

two men rose from the nearest bushes and hurried toward the bridge.

Beatrice became alarmed, and looked in vain for a way of escape—she was hemmed in. Her hand sought the pocket where she kept a revolver, but she was not permitted to use it. The first man made two long bounds, reached her side and seized her arm.

"No, you don't, my dear!" he cried.

Rachel uttered a scream, but terror made it faint. She had no chance to repeat the cry. The other men came to the aid of the first, and the girls were made prisoners speedily. They struggled, protested and threatened in vain; they would call for help, but their mouths were covered.

They were lifted and carried a few rods. There, horses were waiting, and the girls raised, each in front of a captor. The horses were put to a gallop and they went off as fast as was safe.

All had been done quickly; no chance for conversation had been given, and they did not know their abductors; but Miss Elberdean blamed herself for answering the letter. True, she had not gone to a point which would be considered dangerous, usually, but the result proved that nothing more had been necessary for the kidnappers' plot.

When once out of sound of the town the obnoxious covering of their mouths was stopped, but they gained nothing thereby. Not one of their questions was answered, but constantly the three riders pressed on into the mountains.

They were soon in a wild part, well to the north of Mount Nibbletoe and Rolling Trail. Concerning that region the girls knew but little; honest people seldom went there. Report said that it was somewhere along the ragged ridges that Bullion Baron had his home—the thought made them shiver.

After a long ride they entered a canyon where all was dismal and dark—so dark that Beatrice did not know when the sky above was shut off by a rocky span, until she looked up and saw that only a black vault was visible.

Utter darkness was around them, and the feet of the horses rung on solid rock. Then, once more, the scene changed and, making a curve, they saw a great fire blazing a few yards ahead, and its light, thrown out generously, revealed the walls and roof of a cave.

The ringing hoof-strokes brought a figure out of the remote shadows—a man—and Beatrice was not slow to discover that he wore a complete mask, with an imitation eagle rising erect above all.

This man came forward with a long, swinging step.

"Welcome to Echo Cave, ladies!" he cried. "The place dates away back of Noah, I have no doubt, but never before has it been honored by company so fair!"

He bowed with grace, but the pause was not broken by any responsive words.

He advanced to Rachel's side.

"Permit me to assist you to alight," he added.

Rachel shrank back, but she was given no choice in the matter. Her captor set her on her feet in front of the War-Eagle with ceremony, and then the road-agent took her hand.

"A thousand times welcome!" he murmured.

Next, he would have raised the hand to his lips, but he was rudely interrupted. The hand was snatched away, and Beatrice confronted him with flashing eyes. She had sprung down and come to Rachel's defense like a mother eagle defending its young.

"Stand back!" she cried, indignantly.

"Miss?"

"Don't dare to lay your contaminating finger upon her!" was the swift addition.

"Gently, fair lady!"

"If I am fair, I differ from you in all things; you represent only what is foul!"

Bullion Baron folded his arms dramatically.

"Say on!" he directed.

"What need I say to one who must know he is a scoundrel?"

"Bravo!"

"Would that I were a man!"

"And if you were?"

"I would kill you where you stand!"

The outlaw's eyes gleamed behind his mask.

"By my life, I could half consent in order to do honor to you!"

"But, instead, you seek to hold the good will of this innocent girl by burlesque gallantry."

"Of her? Life within me, she is only a firebug o' the night, while you are a blazing star. Do you not know it is you whom I adore?"

"I would sooner be admired by the skulking dog that prowls about the street!"

"He seeks for useless bones; I seek for the fairest damsel that moves this earthly globe upon. Ay, Beatrice, I love you well!"

"Then it is to my disgrace."

"Nay; 'twill be to your great good."

"Craven!"

"How gloriously you voice your venom—but it only makes me love you the more. Worlds may flash and fade, but I bow to you in love eternal as the glory of Cupid's court!"

#### CHAPTER XXXIII.

##### A ROAD-AGENT'S WOOING.

RACHEL had been listening in a peculiar

frame of mind. Doubt, fear, uncertainty, and many emotions conflicting as well as kindred, rushed upon her, and she could not have analyzed her mood even if opportunity had been vouchsafed.

So many persons had declared that Daniel Dixon and Bullion Baron were one that she was in doubt. She looked eagerly at the road-agent; she listened to his voice; but in no way was she able to decide the matter.

He spoke with a degree of impressive power, and she actually began to seek excuses for his past crimes, but her face grew long as she heard him pour out such burning protestations of devotion to Beatrice, and refer to her so slightly.

He had compared her to a fire-bug!

What woman could hear that calmly?

Indignation burned in her mind, and she ceased to seek for excuses. No doubt he was as black as he had been painted.

As for the War-Eagle, he suddenly stopped short in the midst of his extravagant speeches.

"But come," he added, "this is not the time for such discourse. You are my guests, and I am forgetting that you are weary from long riding; I am ashamed of my inhospitality. Follow me, and I will usher you into Echo Cave Parlor."

He made a motion as though to lead, but Beatrice looked toward the direction from which they had come. It seemed impossible to escape, under any circumstances, and when she saw that two of the men stood directly in the way, she abandoned the idea that had come into her mind.

"Untamed?" questioned the War-Eagle, with a short laugh.

"We demand our liberty!" Beatrice answered.

"Impossible!"

"Do you know you are laying yourself liable to the law?"

"Did you ever hear that I had any great love for the law?"

"This is a State's Prison affair!"

"That's nothing. My previous exploits have been Judge Lynch affairs."

"Release us, or you will live to regret it."

"Pray understand that I have captured you deliberately, and am prepared to abide by the result. I am ready to risk limb, life, even soul for you!"

"Beware, Dan Dixon!"

The War-Eagle laughed.

"I've heard that name before."

"You are he!"

"Think so?"

"I know it."

"Come, now, don't give poor Dan a bad name. He's a jolly dog who never did harm to any one. Why do you think I am he? Do the boy justice."

"You writhe on the hook in vain."

"Fishermen are proverbially conceited; you may be a too positive fisherwoman. But, let it pass. Men, conduct the ladies this way. Beatrice, you will see that Bullion Baron is no longer a lone road-agent. The cave has been dull with only old Hecate to look to it and keep me company; henceforth we'll have life, fun and jollity galore here!"

The party was in motion before he ceased speaking. When the minor ruffians started toward the girls, the latter were not slow to avoid their contaminating hands by following the War-Eagle. Escape was out of the question, and they would only precipitate trouble by angering him.

A hundred yards away they came to a second chamber.

Well had it been called a parlor!

A carpet was on the floor, curtains covered the walls, and furniture as good as was to be found in Digger's Folly did its part to make the place attractive. A chandelier overhead held half a dozen oil-lamps.

The place was not gorgeous, but it was comfortable to a degree not to be expected in the remote cavern.

"Here we are!" the War-Eagle heartily announced. "Ladies, help yourselves to easy-chairs and make yourselves as comfortable as may be. Hecate!"

At the latter call one of the curtains was pushed aside, and a bony old woman appeared.

"Bring bread, meat, cake and wine!" he added.

The woman nodded and disappeared.

"Bullion Baron at home!" laughed that person, pleasantly. "Now, ladies, observe that I am not so bad a man as I might be."

"We might believe that of Bullion Baron, but not of Dan Dixon!" Beatrice retorted.

Again the road-agent sounded the peculiar laugh with which he always met any reference to Dixon, but he did not answer. Hecate re-entered, bearing a quantity of food on a waiter. This was placed on a table and the girls were invited to eat, but neither availed herself of the doubtful privilege. Bullion Baron did not urge them, or seem put out in the least, but sat down and ate a solitary lunch.

He was under close attention. Was he really Dan Dixon? Both girls tried to solve the question definitely, but his disguise was perfect, and a peculiar echo in the cave made even their own voices sound unnatural.

They were none the wiser for their efforts. When his appetite had been satisfied the War-Eagle turned to them in a matter-of-fact way.

"This, ladies," he explained, "is to be your home henceforth. The programme has changed, and, as I said before, life and activity are going to reign here. You two will play an important part. Rachel will be an honored guest, while as for Beatrice—well, I've loved her ever since I saw her first, and she is to reign here as Lady Eagle, my wife!"

Beatrice flushed with resentment.

"Have you thought of asking my consent?"

"My dear, you have snubbed me in the past; I do not think you will do so in the future. Having power, I shall use it."

"Villain!"

"Thanks, Lady Eagle!"

"We demand that you return us to our home."

"As a mere matter of form, I decline. You are my prisoners, and you will not leave here until time has proved that you are my friends, good and true. You ought to be proud to become my wife, Beatrice."

Miss Elberdean disdained to reply.

Bullion Baron was not done talking, and he kept it up for some time. As far as his manner went then, he did not appear to bear out his reputation; the severest taunts that Beatrice flung at him failed to anger the man.

His manner, however, was determined, and he was proof alike against all pleas and threats.

After awhile he looked at his watch.

"We will adjourn for a season. I want to give you a chance to come up smiling in the morning, and as I may claim all your time tomorrow, you shall have a good night's sleep. If you will draw the curtains yonder, you will see a rock alcove with a bed within. That's for your use. Old Hecate will be within call, and I assure you that you are as safe as if you were at home."

He paused for a moment, and then added, more emphatically:

"Don't try to escape, though. My men will be between you and the exit, and they will keep close watch. While I intend to be kind and easy, rebellion on your part will be severely met."

He bowed, moved back, and evinced a disposition to go, and they did not seek to detain him. He went, and they were left to themselves, no other person being visible.

Rachel had been very quiet, and glad to keep out of the conversation, but she suddenly found her tongue now.

She was alarmed, worried, perplexed and uncertain, and she wanted the benefit of Beatrice's opinion. What did Beatrice think of the War-Eagle?

Miss Elberdean was not slow to answer. She declared that the man was surely Dixon, and that he had fully proven his evil nature at once. Then Rachel's courage faded all away, and she became more miserable than ever.

If Daniel was a villain, what was left in life worth living for?

Beatrice did not give her time to useless lamentations and forebodings. In spite of the War-Eagle's warnings, she intended to make an effort to escape before the dawn of another day. It was probable, as he had said, that he would arrange everything as far as possible to keep them secure, but ingenuity might overturn his plans.

Two hours passed. There was silence in the room.

Rachel sat with clasped hands, staring ahead with an air of deep trouble; Beatrice appeared as calm as though they were at Merton house.

The silence was broken unexpectedly and strangely.

"Excuse me ladies!" said a voice.

They looked quickly. Nothing was visible but a human head, and that was hemmed in by two curtains at the point where they met, as if the head had been framed.

The head was not of an attractive order. It had a very red complexion, and a beard and head of hair which seemed to have been strangers to comb and brush for many months—a very disreputable head, on the whole.

Beatrice recognized it as belonging to a man she had seen at the cave after their arrival, and she experienced sudden alarm. The man's whole manner was furtive, and he did not look like one to be trusted.

She gazed at him in silence, dreading the next movement on his part.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### A MAN IN DISGUISE.

The man at the curtain finally became weary of waiting for a reply.

"If it isn't against etiquette," he added, "I would like to address you."

If silence gave consent, he had encouragement enough; there was no reply.

"Are you alone?" he continued.

"What is it to you?" asked Beatrice, rallying.

"A good deal; I am here to rescue you."

"Yet you are one of Bullion Baron's men."

"I am; but do you know my name?"

"No."

"I am Gun-stock!"

This surprising statement brought a contemptuous smile to Beatrice's face.

"You look like him—"

"I am in disguise. Do you suppose I would be allowed in this cave if I came openly, and Bullion Baron knew me to be Gun-stock?"

"Do you really claim to be Dan Dixon—"

"I lost emphatically, I do not! I don't know Dixon, and don't want to; I am Gun-stock, and nobody else. I am here to capture Bullion Baron, and have joined his band for that very purpose. Great was my surprise to see you brought here, ladies, but I hope to rescue you."

"What new scheme have you in mind?"

"Still suspicious!"

"What else do you expect? I would thank you, by the way, to address yourself to Miss Merton."

"She is an estimable lady, no doubt, but I see no reason why I should address her. It is with you that I am acquainted—in whom I am interested."

"The interest is not mutual!"

"So you have assured me before, but that is not to the point; I am here to rescue you—"

"Prove that you are the man who sees fit to call himself Gun-stock!"

"I can't very well do it. I am elaborately disguised, and to remove any part of the affair would be to make me an easy mark for critical eyes. The War-Eagle has made a change of base and engaged several rough fellows to help him here, from which I infer that he is either about to retire, or to launch about anew. I managed to be among those engaged, my disguise making me look the veritable cut throat, but the odds are all against me, and I must go slow."

"What is to hinder us going out now?"

"Several men in the track, and a wide-awake guard at the only exit."

Beatrice looked critically at the speaker. There was an air of veracity about him now, but she found it hard to trust the man. It was her opinion that some new plot lurked behind an offer outwardly fair, but why should it be so? If this man was Bullion Baron, himself, come in a new guise, what was he to gain by it?

Were they not already in his power completely?

"What do you propose?" he asked, after a pause.

"I want you to put faith in me, and believe that I have your good in view. I cannot accomplish miracles, but I do hope to get you out of the power of the outlaw. The way is not yet clear, and I must go and work for you. If I can get the guard out of the way, or arrange matters in any other form, then I will come to you again. Is it a bargain?"

"We certainly shall not refuse a chance to escape."

"Good! Then you only have to wait. Be of good courage, but do not venture to sleep. Beware of the old woman, for she is as dangerous a foe as you have here. Good-by, for now!"

He waved his hand; the curtains fell back into place, and the man was gone.

Silence reigned for awhile, and then Beatrice rose, went to the curtain and parted it. Just behind was the ragged wall of rock, but sign neither of human beings nor any light.

She sat down to meditate. Rachel had many questions to ask, but they were vaguely answered.

Beatrice did not know what to think of Gun-stock and his offer, but she could not throw off the doubts which had become so much a part of her nature; she did not believe in his promises.

At last she made known the result of her meditations.

"Rachel, I am not going to sit here like a statue of Patience in a closet!"

"No?"

"I am not. The night is wearing on to that point when men sleep soundly. I have no desire to remain and wait on the War-Eagle's pleasure, and, though we are assured that we cannot escape, I am going to try it!"

"But he—Gun-stock—advised us not to stir!"

"Rachel, pray don't mention that man to me again!"

Miss Elberdean spoke with an air of mingled command and disgust, but even the unfortunate Gun-stock would have admitted that she said it charmingly. She arose as she spoke.

"We are without arms, but we must trust to Providence. Follow me!"

Rachel felt symptoms of a panic, but dared not oppose her resolute cousin. She followed where Beatrice led. The latter passed behind the curtain. The latter article left an irregular space next to the rocks, but there was room for them to pass without disturbing the drapery.

On leaving the recess thus made, they found total darkness ahead of them, but they could not take a light. It would surely betray them to the outlaws, and there was a bare chance that, if they went quietly, they might succeed.

It was a most unpleasant journey. At times they collided with the wall, or had to feel their way, and even Beatrice felt her courage waver. She finally paused.

"Haven't we gone nearly far enough to reach the outer chamber?" she asked.

"I should think so."

"I am afraid we have taken the wrong passage."

"Where are we, then?"

"That is a question which can be solved only by going further," Beatrice answered, calmly.

"We may be going into the heart of some desolate region. I don't know how it is, but I feel that we shall be safer than elsewhere. Even barren rocks are better than the outlaws' company. Let us go on."

Another hundred yards were passed, and then a light appeared not far ahead. They went on, and a second chamber of rock appeared—a place they had not seen before. A brand thrust in a crevice served well as a light.

The place was not unoccupied. A rough fellow paced to and fro, yawning often, and, just beyond him, two other men were to be seen. Both appeared to be prisoners.

In them the girls recognized familiar faces, for one was Jonas Hutchinson, and the other Mordaunt Randolph, though the latter's name was not known to Rachel or Beatrice.

There was a measure of relief at seeing they were not alone in captivity, though not much was to be expected in the way of aid from two gray-haired men, who were both bound.

"We will wait and watch here," Beatrice whispered, and they sunk down in a recess.

One question was in Miss Elberdean's mind: Could they manage to get the male prisoners free? She had no good opinion of Jonas, but help from any source was not to be despised. She saw that the outlaw guard was sleepy, and wished that he would yield to the insidious foe.

This he seemed trying to ward off by keeping in motion, but several hours of the night yet remained, and he might not think it necessary, later, to watch bound men.

Several minutes passed without change, and then footsteps sounded. The girls shrunk back further in the recess.

A man appeared, and they started when they recognized the rough fellow who had claimed to be Gun-stock in disguise. He walked boldly toward the guard.

"Well, how goes it, comrade?" he asked.

"All alive yet."

"Getting sleepy?"

"Sleepy! I'm ready ter drop. All that has kept me up has been a quarrel between the pris'ners."

"Why did they quarrel?"

"Oh, some old grudge. They sassed each other lively, but both has shut up, and they are sulkin'. If you say so, I'll stir 'em up an' see ef they'll fight some more. Want ter hear 'em?"

"Never mind; I don't care whether they quarrel or not. By the way, I've had a sleep and feel like keeping awake, so I will relieve you, if you say so."

The guard shook his head.

"Can't do it. My orders is ter hold on until Jim Ponsonby comes ter relieve me."

"What odds does it make who does it?"

"Biz is biz. I reckon we all bev a boodle hyar with Bullion Baron, for he's a money-maker; but we don't come in fur a share ef we kick over the traces. You know he said that obedience was the first law o' our membership."

"You're right, old man," Gun-stock agreed, heartily. "If the captain's orders run that way, be sure to obey them. If you must stand guard, however, what you need is a 'bracer.'"

"Wish I had a horn o' whisky!"

"Just what I can give you, comrade. I have a flask nearly full, and I don't mind giving you a nip. I've had a big one. I did think of saving the rest, for it is A 1; but I hate to see a man suffer. Cut the cobwebs out of your throat!"

Speaking heartily, the disguised man extended a flask, and his companion did not hesitate to take the proffered drink.

He made it a hearty one, too.

"Can't we have a game of cards?" Gun-stock added.

"With all my heart. Sit down!"

The guard looked happy, and he was wider awake than he had been for a long time.

A convenient slab of rock made a good table, and they sat down and began to play. Beatrice and Rachel watched anxiously. If the red-faced outlaw was really Gun-stock, the test of his alleged loyalty seemed to be at hand. If he was opposed to the gang, it must be that some trap lurked in the flask.

Playing began and went on briskly, but it went all in favor of the guard; Gun-stock did not appear to be an adept.

Twenty minutes passed, and the guard's play weakened. He made stupid blunders, and did not notice the fact. Once or twice he allowed Gun-stock to push over cards which he had lost, not won; but he took them without seeing that it was not legitimate property. He yawned; his eyes grew heavy; he finally stopped in the midst of a play, leaned back against the rocky wall and fell asleep.

Gun-stock allowed several minutes to pass quietly, and then arose.

He shook the outlaw; the latter did not even stir. Then he turned to Hutchinson and Randolph.

"Gentlemen," he said, in an even voice, "do

you like captivity, or would you prefer to escape?"  
Both started in surprise.  
"Escape!" Randolph echoed.  
"That's the word."  
"Do you mean to jest with us?"  
"I mean to get you away, if I can."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## THE GUIDE.

THE prisoners regarded Gun-stock doubtfully, but Randolph finally made reply:

"For one of the road-agent's men, you talk strangely."

"I am a secret foe here; I only joined the band to bring them to grief. Does that make my position any plainer?" Gun-stock asked.

"Oh! won't you help me to find my gold?" Hutchinson cried. "I have learned that money stolen from me was in turn taken from the thieves by Bullion Baron. I'll pay you well to recover it!"

"Misfortune seize you and your gold!" Gun-stock retorted. "No; I won't help you in that way, and I cordially hope your money is gone forever. But that's not to the subject. If I release you, are you ready to help rescue other prisoners?"

"I am, for one," Randolph quickly responded.

"And you, Hutchinson?"

"Is there danger?"

"Yes."

"Then I would rather be excused—"

"Very well; I'll leave you here!"

Speaking in a disgusted manner, Gun-stock moved forward and cut Randolph's bonds.

"Follow me!" he directed. "We are only two, but that won't prevent our trying hard."

"Wait!—wait!" exclaimed Jonas, in a panic.

"What now?"

"Don't leave me!"

"But I won't take a man who won't help us."

"I will help—I will. In mercy's name, don't leave me here!"

"You are a scoundrel and coward!" Gun-stock retorted. "My judgment bids me leave you, but I can't afford to go all by my mere opinions. We will take you, but I warn you that any double-dealing will cost you dear."

"Why do you doubt me?"

"Because you are Jonas Hutchinson."

"But I never saw you before."

Gun-stock did not answer, but turned to Randolph.

"Now, Mr.—"

"Smith," Randolph prompted.

"Mr. Smith, I rely upon you to do a good deal. The light is poor here, but you appear like a brave man, as near as I can see. There are two young ladies in this cave, as prisoners. I shall rescue them or die in the attempt. Are you with me?"

"I am," the alleged Mr. Smith declared.

"Then let us go to them at once."

They started, but Beatrice suddenly rose in their path.

"You have not far to go," she announced.

"You here?" cried Gun-stock.

"We are. We improved the chance to get past our guards—if, indeed, any were near the prison given us—and here we are."

"A guard was supposed to be near there, but he may have fallen asleep. However, let us not speculate upon that matter; the order of the occasion is to escape. There may be rocky times ahead of us. We can't go out as you came in, for any attempt would bring all the outlaws upon us; and Bullion Baron has bound them to him, body and soul. There is another passage, and this we must tread, though I know not what may come of the attempt."

"Lead on!" Beatrice replied. "We will—trust you!"

The words came as though with an effort but they brought a sparkle to Gun-stock's eyes.

He looked far happier than before.

He gave Randolph a revolver and extra torch, and then provided himself with one freshly lighted.

"Follow me," he directed. "No time is to be lost, for pursuit led by the War-Eagle would be likely to result in our ruin. He knows the way; we do not."

The light showed a natural corridor of rock stretching away toward the west, or from the main part of the cave; and the retreat was begun.

Gun-stock, of course, was the ruling spirit. He awakened fresh inquiries in the minds of the girls. Who was he? Rachel found no pleasure in the silent question. Her love-affair appeared to have gone to ruin; he almost ignored her.

Surely, she thought, there must be some mistake; he could not be the Dan Dixon she had known—she would not believe it; she would believe nothing evil or treacherous of him!

This was noble faith, and very much like Rachel, but the fact remained that she had seen Gun-stock without any disguise and declared him to be Dan.

The party were shown that the cavern was one of great resources, for passages and chambers existed in abundance, and stretched away wherever they went. That danger existed in this fact the guide was not long in perceiving.

As the passages crossed each other often, and were never direct, there was a strong probability that they would wander back to the road-agents' quarters again.

It was not a sociable party, except in the way of business. Gun-stock set an example by refraining from all conversation; he never spoke except to consult with Randolph when he was at a loss—or so appeared to be—which one of two passages to take.

He showed a boldness which, if honest, stamped him as a man of unusual resolution, and even Beatrice did not object to giving him full authority.

Wearied as they were by previous hardships, and now forced, at times, to pass over rough ground, the girls wondered when they would reach the open air.

The cavern was like a vast tomb, and the black rocks, often water-dripping, made nearly all nervous and gloomy.

Gun-stock suddenly stopped after an attentive look at Beatrice and Rachel.

"You must rest," he declared. "Sit down, and get as much good out of it as you can."

"Do not mind us; we can still go on," Beatrice replied, bravely.

"Not so. It would be folly to waste our strength. We don't know where we shall come forth from this lower world, and we want to reserve our powers."

He found a place where all could sit comfortably and a lull followed. There was much of antagonistic material in the party. Randolph and Hutchinson kept well apart from one another, and Gun-stock made no effort to address the two young ladies.

Beatrice found herself regarding him curiously. In his disguise he was not a pleasant object, but she saw him more as he had been before them as a man in disguise.

She wondered if she had wronged the man, but was not disposed to change her judgment yet.

Ten minutes passed; then he abruptly rose and walked to the nearest turn in the passage. There he stood in silence for a few moments, and then returned with quick steps.

"I may as well say plainly that I fear we are pursued!" he announced. "There are voices in the rear, and I see but one way to explain them."

"Our absence has been discovered?"

"So I think."

"What are we to do?"

"Go on, at once. It does not seem possible that they can follow us with any degree of system. Prompt flight ought to carry us through the danger."

Gun-stock looked thoughtfully at Beatrice as he spoke, as though tempted to offer her his arm, but he did not carry out the idea. Perhaps he remembered the rebuffs of the past!

He got the party under way promptly, and they hurried through the rock corridors. Gun-stock would not permit them to run—that was a last resort, and it was well to save their strength.

His judgment was soon proved good.

Perhaps another ten minutes of rapid progress had been consumed when, turning a point of rock, they came full upon another party, equipped like them with torches, and evidently bent on business. They were Bullion Baron's men, though the War-Eagle was not at their head.

The discovery was mutual, and the outlaws set up a shout and started toward the fugitives. One of that imperiled party recovered his wits at once. Gun-stock wheeled upon those who followed him.

"Flee!" he cried. "Run, for your lives. We will cover your retreat."

Once more he turned, facing the road-agents. His revolver was raised and fired, the report sounding strangely loud in the peculiar place. The outlaws shouted and sprung toward him, whereupon he fired again and again.

So much Rachel saw and heard, but what happened next she did not know. She had turned and fled at full speed. Thoroughly alarmed, she ran in a headlong way—a dangerous thing to do, for she was soon in darkness and in danger of running upon the pointed rocks.

Chance favored her, but she finally struck her foot and fell with painful force. When she had scrambled to her feet she was in a more meditative mood.

Breathless and panting, she stood still, pressed her hand over her fast-beating heart, and looked back. She saw no one; she heard nothing.

"Beatrice!"

She called the name, but there was no reply. She listened, thinking that some one must be near, but all in vain. Footsteps she might not be able to distinguish, but she had left the men in battle, discharging revolvers and shouting. Where were all the men now?

"Beatrice!"

Rachel uttered the cry again, and her last particle of courage oozed away when she found there was no answer.

The unwelcome, alarming truth broke upon her that in her headlong flight she had become separated from every one else.

She was lost in the cave!

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## A COMPANION AT LAST.

RACHEL was in despair, and even a braver heart might have sunk then. She had to face other dangers than those arising from the road-agents, and she felt that their company was preferable to solitude.

Thinking that Beatrice must be near, and willing to risk meeting the outlaws rather than no one, she turned back and walked as fast as was possible. The luck which had been hers before had gone, and she ran upon the rocky wall here and there when she least expected it.

Still she pressed on until one fact became undeniable—she surely had gone further than when running away, and that meant that she had failed to follow the right passage.

Frightened, weary and disheartened, she sat down and gave way to tears. If she could have had Beatrice's company she might have borne up, but it was out of the question there.

She felt in her pocket for matches, vain as the attempt seemed. She found none, and had no way to break the profound darkness.

After a while she arose and went on again. If it was not destined that she should starve in the cave she must come out somewhere, or meet some one. She would have welcomed Bullion Baron himself then.

She wandered along for some time, the course of the passages often compelling her to deviate from a direct course, and adding to her confusion. At last she saw something which brought her to an abrupt stop. A broad, quivering band of light was thrown on the wall just ahead of her, and she discovered that some one was approaching.

Who was it?

She stood in breathless anxiety, and then a man, torch in hand, turned a point of rock and stood almost face to face with her.

He stopped in what appeared to be amazement, but her own face lighted up with joy. Then the expression was reflected in his own countenance, and he sprung forward eagerly.

"Rachel!" he cried. "My dear, dear girl!"

And then he passed his arm around her, and kissed her again and again.

"Thank Heaven! I meet you again!" he added.

"Oh! Dan, Dan!" she murmured.

"Yes, it is I."

"I feared the outlaws had killed you."

"Oh! no."

"What have you done with your disguise?"

"What disguise?"

"Why, the one you wore when you were guiding us, to-night."

"To-night! You have not seen me before!"

He made the assertion unhesitatingly, and Rachel wondered where the explanation of the mystery was to be found. Unless her eyes deceived her strangely, the man before her was Daniel Dixon, and the same man who had asked her to become his wife weeks before: yet he, or his double, had been denying much and alleging more, of late.

"Do you mean," added the young man, after a pause, "that some one has been personating me?"

"He was disguised, but he said he was Gun-stock."

"Gun-stock? Do you think I am that knave?"

"I don't know what to think."

"I'll tell you. Gun-stock is Bullion Baron!"

"Oh, Dan!"

"At least, I feel sure of it; I have no positive proof. It seems that he does resemble me strongly—it must be very strong to have deceived even you—and he has made the most of it. When they had him under arrest at the town, they could have avoided a good deal of trouble by giving him right over to Judge Lynch!"

Rachel felt a twinge of dismay.

Only for her, no one would have raised a hand to help Gun-stock escape, that memorable night.

"Of course he's the War-Eagle," Dixon added. "and I have been hunting for him. He has put a blot on my name, and I am not safe until he is captured."

Rachel heard with wonder. Even so had the mysterious Gun-stock talked!

"In my surprise at meeting you," Dixon added, abruptly, "I am forgetting the most important part of all. Why in the world are you here?"

"We were captured by Bullion Baron."

"The scoundrel! But, who else was captured?"

"Beatrice."

"No friend of mine!" muttered Dan, frowning, "but, for your sake, I'll bear her no ill-will. Well, what next? Why are you here? Where is she?"

Rachel told the story as coherently as possible. Her companion had several questions to ask, and he frowned frequently, or shook his head. When she had finished he gave his verdict promptly:

"It is all a scheme on the War-Eagle's part. It was he, disguised, who conducted you away, and he never meant that you should escape. All was arranged in advance, and it was done

to win your confidence; but you upset his plans by escaping in reality. No doubt, he has Beatrice back."

"He acted like one sincere."

"No doubt."

"I think that you ought to see him before you condemn him, Dan."

"Possibly you are right, for I have been judged basely, myself; but, I regard it as a positive fact that he is the outlaw. I hope to meet Mr. Gun-stock face to face yet. Now, Rachel, what of ourselves?"

"Yes, Dan."

"Can you lead me to Bullion Baron's lair?"

"No; I am hopelessly lost."

"No wonder. The size of this cave, or series of caves, is remarkable; the mountain is almost honeycombed. I am in here, and I'm after the War-Eagle, but I confess that I have tackled a big job. I started in here at ten o'clock, and it is now two. I have wandered on and on, but never a sign of the outlaw have I seen, direct or indirect. I have plain evidence that I have wandered at random, and gone over the same ground more than once; for I've several times seen certain objects over and over."

"Can we get out?" Rachel asked, nervously.

"That remains to be seen."

"Don't you think we had better try?"

"I do, assuredly. As much as I want to find Bullion Baron, I will not expose you to any danger. If possible, we will leave this tomb of Nature. Have no fear"—Rachel's face reflected her nervous anxiety—"for I will defend you to the end!"

He bent upon her a loving look which comforted her not a little. If his double had been cold, the same could not be said of the real Dan—he was exactly as he had been in the days when he wooed her; the days before trouble came.

Clasping his arm around her waist, Dan led the way toward—what? No one could tell; it might be to liberty, or into the outlaws' hands.

A journey was begun which was a repetition of that made by Rachel before. Dixon tried to make it one of system, but he was wholly at fault. If he had possessed a compass he might have held to a general direction, but it was out of the question now. They frequently turned corners, but what course they took afterward neither knew.

Dan helped Rachel all he could, but she had been weary at the start, and this weariness, of course, increased all the while. At last he insisted upon her sitting down to rest. She did this and fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

Her lover watched over her. He could not see that they were adding to their danger by this delay, and he determined to guard her health as well as her liberty.

Rachel slept for hours, and, when she awoke, Dan's watch showed that it lacked only a little of day in the outer world—all was night there.

Her self-reproaches were quieted by Dan, and then they resumed their course. Just when they had expected it least, they found success within their grasp. They had not traveled five minutes before they suddenly emerged from the corridor; they saw the light of day, and found themselves in a pocket-like mountain valley.

Nor was this all.

Men were there, and Rachel gave a cry of joy as she recognized one to be her father. A moment more and she was clasped in his arms.

There was a war of glances between Dan Dixon and the other men. Many of them he knew; some had figured as his accusers. Besides Merton, Sheriff Williams, Tobias Partridge, Lewis Jackson and Dusky Dan were there.

Jackson saw his schemes trembling in the balance, and felt that he must move quickly in order to turn events in his favor.

"Arrest that man!" he cried, pointing to Dixon. "Wherever others may be, here is Bullion Baron!"

"Liar!" retorted Dan, fiercely.

"Of course he denies it, but, there can be no doubt. Sheriff, you know your duty."

"Not so fast! Miss Merton has a word to say here."

"Did we wait for her when we arrested him before?"

"You never arrested me!" declared Dixon.

"Ha! the fellow is as ready with lies as ever."

"Go slow, Lewis Jackson!" Dan Dixon warned. "Your own safety demands that you don't let your vindictive meanness run away with you. I give warning to all that I will not be arrested, as Bullion Baron, or otherwise!"

And the young man placed his back to a rock and held more tightly to the revolver he had carried constantly ready for use.

#### CHAPTER XXXVII.

##### THE LIVING MYSTERY.

BEATRICE had the best of reasons for not keeping along with Rachel in the latter's flight. Not far had Miss Elberdean gone when she ran against the wall of the corridor, and the collision flung her to the ground with such force that she was stunned.

When she recovered consciousness she was alone in darkness and silence.

Although confused for awhile, memory soon returned and she realized her position. That of her late companions was not so clear. They had been pursued by the outlaws, but what the result had been Beatrice did not know.

She was self-possessed, but had seen enough of the cave to know that it was no trifling matter to be left alone there as she was.

She thought of Rachel with more pity than she bestowed upon herself.

What her timid cousin would do in that emergency was a serious question.

Finding it impossible to tell through which passage she had come in her flight, or in which way lay the War-Eagle's quarters, she walked on at random, only seeking to maintain a direct course.

Chance led her to meet another wanderer almost as Rachel had met Dan Dixon.

She saw a light approaching, and only had time enough to step into a recess when the disguised man who had claimed to be Gun-stock made his appearance. He appeared to have met with hard usage. His false beard was entirely gone, one arm in an improvised sling, and the fictitious color of his face had given place to a mixture of white and red, the latter being smears of blood.

He was entirely alone.

Beatrice was uncertain what to do, but his appearance suggested that he needed friendly care, and she put her doubts aside and stepped out of the recess.

He started, made a movement toward his revolver, and then brightened up wonderfully.

"You, here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she replied, simply.

"Thank Heaven, you are safe!"

"Rachel!—where is she?"

"I don't know. Is she lost?"

"Yes. I hoped she was with you."

"There was hard fighting," Gun-stock explained, leaning against the wall. "That wretch, Hutchinson, fled like a craven. Smith—whoever he is—stood by me nobly; he acted the hero, and fought valiantly for one of his years. However, we were no match for the outlaws. I had received two wounds, and was finally struck down. I think that Smith then retreated, followed by the enemy. When I recovered my only company was the ruins left, and this included two dead outlaws. I had lost considerable blood, and was weakened thereby. I arose, took a fallen torch and began to search the corridors. I saw no one until I met you."

This account was quietly given, and Beatrice found herself growing more lenient toward Mr. Gun-stock. If he had stood before her as strong as ever, she might have kept her distance, but she had a womanly heart as well as a strong mind, and she did not fail to see that he looked weak and suffering.

"Have you cared for your wound?" she asked.

"Not much."

"Does it pain you?"

"A trifle."

"Will you allow me to look at it? I am called quite a surgeon."

"I do not want to trouble you."

"It will be no trouble, I assure you. Besides, you received the hurt while fighting my enemies; I should be heartless to be indifferent now!"

Gun-stock objected no further. She found a long gash in his arm, and though it had providentially missed any great artery, it was deep enough to alarm her, and create wonder that he was able to stand.

Beatrice took charge in a manner in which command and gentleness were mingled, and they went on until they reached running water. There he sat down on a rock and she dressed the wound.

Her resources were limited, but not her ingenuity, and she won and received his commendation. He spoke modestly and quietly, and unlike the Gun-stock who had won her resentment the night when he was a prisoner with his gallant and exaggerated speeches—so she considered them.

Yet Gun-stock never felt more like giving strong praise. He experienced strange emotions while the wound was being dressed. Her fingers softly touched his arm; her face was near his own; her breath fanned his cheek.

All this he was conscious of, and her charms and her kindness intoxicated him. While she thought him a hero for receiving the wound in her behalf, he thought himself a hero for maintaining dignified composure while so charming a girl cared for a hurt he scarcely heeded.

When it was done he renewed his wig, and washed away the coloring on his face, and came out the same Gun-stock who had sat in the alcove of Merton house, and admired the way she made biscuits, albeit a very ragged cavalier now.

He gladly would have lingered at the place, but she broke the spell with a practical question:

"What are we to do now?"

Gun-stock hesitated.

"I cannot rest while Rachel is in danger," added Miss Elberdean.

"We will search for her, though, with one useless arm, I am hardly fit to fight Bullion Baron and his men. Strategy, however, may help me out."

"I can help you; I have my revolver."

"Let us hope you'll have no need of using it."

"What do you think of Rachel's chances?"

"That's a question hard to answer. I arrived at this cavern only one day ahead of you. I had put on my disguise in order to make myself safe from unfriendly eyes, and I looked so villainous, I suppose, that Bullion Baron shackled on to me with the toughs, to join his band. Having been here such a short time, I have but little knowledge of the cavern, except that it is very large. Rachel may have escaped."

"Or she may be lost in these bewildering passages."

"Let us hope not. However, we'll go on and look for her."

"You are not fit for the work; you are weak, and in pain."

"That's nothing."

"Still, the wound was received while fighting my enemies, and I cannot be forgetful of it."

Gun-stock did not reply. He had experienced the lady's unreasoning condemnation in the past; perhaps he was not reluctant to have a measure of justice to offset it.

The search was continued, but Beatrice could not help thinking that it would go hard with them if they found any one. She had a presentiment that Rachel was captured, and Gun-stock was not fit to do further fighting. Of course his wounded arm was still in the improvised sling, but he carried a revolver in his free hand, and bore himself boldly, yet modestly. Beatrice insisted upon carrying the torch.

This peculiar procession went its way slowly, and traversed the winding passages for some time. Gun-stock tried to use some method, but was obliged to confess that he could see nothing encouraging in his efforts.

The frequent turns were bewildering.

One thing he could and did do; the danger of wandering back into the main cave was great, and he watched ahead sharply.

His caution was finally rewarded.

The light of a torch appeared in advance, and they approached it with great care. They were not seen in return, and a striking scene was soon revealed to them.

In a small chamber of the cave a man was laboring with a spade, throwing up the soil and acting like one with a definite purpose in view. More than this, he was heavily masked, and above his head rose a mimic eagle.

"Bullion Baron!" exclaimed Gun-stock, in a low voice.

Beatrice looked and was convinced. She saw by the spade-wielder's side various small, stout bags, and the fact dawned upon her that the War-Eagle was digging up his treasure, evidently as a preliminary to flight.

Gun-stock's eyes were sparkling.

"My time has come!" he announced. "The outlaw seems to be alone, and I am going to capture him!"

"Don't try it!" Beatrice protested.

"Why not?"

"In your present condition, he will surely kill you."

"I don't intend to give him the chance; but, anyway, I shall make the attempt. I have searched for him long and hard; I will now prove to you at least, my innocence, or die in the effort!"

Beatrice experienced a feeling of dismay. She felt that it was more because she had accused him, than for any other reason, that he was going to risk the result.

"I feel guilty to make the statement so late," she faintly replied, "but, I see that we—that I have wronged you. I do believe in your innocence. Don't put your life in jeopardy, now!"

"I thank you, but, the die is cast," Gun-stock firmly answered. "Don't fear for me; all will come out well. Wait here!"

Delaying for no further speech he moved silently and carefully upon the outlaw. The War-Eagle still used his spade, unconscious of danger. Nearer and nearer Gun-stock came. At last he was only a few feet distant, and then he raised his voice:

"Ahoy, there!" he exclaimed.

Bullion Baron gave a start and wheeled around.

He found himself covered by a revolver.

"Surrender, or die!" Gun-stock added, peremptorily.

The outlaw's hand moved toward his pocket.

"Stop!" cried the other "if you try to draw a weapon I shall shoot you. Your crimes have forfeited your life, and I will show you no mercy. Yield at once!"

The road-agent stood in sullen silence.

Gun-stock flashed a glance at the bags lately dug up; there was every indication that they held treasure of some sort.

"Now," he went on, "I will trouble you to face to the front and march where I say. I shall be at your elbow, and my revolver will be at your head. You know what that means!"

Still Bullion Baron did not answer. His eyes glittered venomously behind his mask, but he was not blind to the fact that he had met a man every degree as determined as himself.

He dared not resist, and would not trust his voice.

Beatrice came forward, and, while Gun-stock kept his revolver bearing on their common enemy, she relieved him of his arms. He was thus rendered helpless as long as his captor could keep the revolver in a winning position.

Gun-stock had no idea in which way they ought to go, but the necessity of action of some kind was obvious. Leaving the treasure-bags just as they were, he put the War-Eagle in motion and drove the fellow before them through the passages.

It was a precarious advantage, it seemed, for they might drive him into the midst of his own men.

Fear that this would prove so grew stronger in Gun-stock's mind as they went on, for the War-Eagle showed a composure which indicated some hope in reserve. At each branch passage he paused to let his captor decide which way he was to go, and the latter made the decision according to the impulse of the moment.

That he made a wise decision at some point was soon proven.

There was a sudden change in the character of the light which made the torch grow paler, and then Bullion Baron suddenly paused. Gun-stock was at his heels, and he saw the light of day, a rocky mountain valley, and a group of men, some of whom seemed to be quarreling.

Beatrice uttered a cry and ran past War-Eagle. Another moment and she and Rachel were in each other's arms!

Gun-stock saw only Benjamin Merton distinctly, and he pushed his prisoner forward. The time had come for what he had not yet attempted—the unmasking of the outlaw. The latter turned with flashing eyes as though to resist, but the revolver forced him to meet the crisis he seemed to dread so much.

"Gentlemen," announced Gun-stock, in a clear voice, "let me introduce to you the road-agent, Bullion Baron!"

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

##### ALL SEE CLEARLY.

THIS announcement was a surprise to all, and they gazed in wonder at the well-known figure of the man who had so long been the terror of Danger Divide. No one moved, however, and Bullion Baron turned to Gun-stock.

"Let me escape," he pleaded, piteously, "and I will make you a millionaire!"

"Scoundrel!" Gun-stock retorted; "ten times ten millions would not purchase your freedom from me! The world shall see you as you are!"

Dropping his revolver he reached up, grasped the road-agent's mask and tore it away. With it came the mimic eagle, and a well-known person stood revealed to the crowd.

"Lombard!" uttered Merton, in wonder.

It was a revelation to all, for the tongue of friend or foe had never connected the grave Commissioner of Public Improvements with the wild work on Rolling Trail. Even Gun-stock was amazed, but he found voice to add:

"Here you see the real War-Eagle, at last."

"Impossible!" Benjamin Merton declared.

"I am a witness that it is possible and true," cried Beatrice. "He was captured among his ill-gotten treasures; there is no mistake."

Emory Lombard was silent, but his appearance showed what a terrible blow his downfall was. Great drops of perspiration stood upon his ashen face, and his eyes had a wild gleam.

"I am here as a witness that Lombard is a knave!" declared a new voice, and Mordaunt Randolph emerged from the cave. "I've heard him plot with Lewis Jackson to win two young ladies by violence, fraud and plot."

"Liar!" shouted Jackson, starting forward.

"Uncle Merton," added Beatrice, "I believe all this, for Jackson has threatened me and Rachel."

It was Jackson's inning, and he stormed, threatened and pleaded, but Merton was aroused by the dangers the girls had undergone, and he ordered both Lewis and Lombard under arrest.

Public opinion changes quickly, and all were ready to believe Lombard guilty. He had been regarded, before that, as a grave, honest man, whose whole mind was bent upon public work and duty, but it was recalled, now, that he had always been absent when Bullion Baron's raids were made.

The plotter, however, had hoodwinked even his ally in minor misdemeanors; Jackson had never suspected the truth.

During this scene one man had been forgotten—the true Dan Dixon. He had been looking strangely at Gun-stock, since the latter's coming interrupted his own peril, and he now advanced.

The two men stood face to face, and those who noticed the fact marveled at the remarkable resemblance. No wonder there had been much confusion of identity in the past. Alike were they in form and face—in color of hair and eyes; alike in every feature; and the observers were simply dumfounded.

Gun-stock turned and saw his own double

gazing at him with that strange expression, and over Gun-stock's face flashed a startled, wondering look.

Then Dixon put out his hands.

"Brother!" he exclaimed, in a tremulous voice.

Joy flashed to Gun-stock's face.

"Brother!" he echoed, and then the strange couple were clasped in a responsive embrace.

The spectators still looked on in bewilderment, but the resemblance between the men whom they had so curiously confounded, in the past, appeared to grow stronger.

Dan and Gun-stock with clasped hands, laughed, and looked into each other's faces with eyes far from being dry.

"I thought you were drowned in the Missouri!" cried Gun-stock.

"And I thought the same of you!"

"I clung to a log, but, too weak to save myself, floated thirty miles before I was rescued."

"And I, badly injured, was flung by the water on the river-bank, and lay ill a month in a hunter's cabin."

"Thank heaven that there remains another to bear with me the Randolph name!"

"What name?" and Mordaunt Randolph started forward.

"I," Gun-stock announced, "am, really, named Berwick Randolph; and this is my twin brother, Berkeley!"

The old gentleman fell upon his knees.

"God be praised!" he cried, clasping his hands.

Dusky Dan began to dance in wild fashion.

"It's my old master!" he cried. "He's alive! It's Master Randolph alive!"

The name brought a start from both the brothers.

"Who?" Gun-stock demanded.

The old gentleman arose.

"I am Mordaunt Randolph, your own father!" he announced; "at least, such is the fact if you are the twin brothers born at Solocove on Christmas Day, twenty-four years ago."

"We are those brothers, but, our father died at the hands of an assassin when we were very young."

"So it was believed, and I was struck down and actually buried by an enemy who thought he had killed me, but I lived; I escaped from the bushes and pebbly earth piled upon me; I am still alive. But, great heavens! I was made to believe that my wife and twin boys were dead—"

"Our mother still lives, and is in Wisconsin."

"No, no!" cried Dusky Dan. "She's a good deal nearer than that; she's in Digger's Folly, now!"

"In Digger's Folly?" Gun-stock echoed.

"Yes; she came here under the name of Rosamond Grake, and she's very sick, now."

"Must be the woman at my house," put in Tobias Partridge, wonderingly.

"Then she came here to meet our old foe," continued Gun-stock. "I did the same, but the men of the town captured me, and accused me of being Bullion Baron. Perhaps you can now see, gentlemen, why I would not tell my real name; I would not have the news that I was arrested as a road-agent go back to where I thought my mother was."

"We are too much confused to think clearly," replied Merton, "but I see that we have wronged you."

Mordaunt Randolph had been standing in bewilderment.

"Can it be that my wife and boys live, when I thought them dead many years ago?" he murmured.

"It's a fact, master," answered Dusky Dan. "I left your service almost twenty years ago but I entered that of my old mistress lately and came to Digger's Folly with her. We saw Hutchinson and made him pay us money, but, Bullion Baron stole it from us, giving me a wound on the head which so crazed me that I wandered in the mountains for awhile, dressed in bearskins."

Mordaunt scarcely heard the last words. He had turned to his sons. As they had been separated from him in their youth, and he had thought them dead, as they had believed him long in his grave, it was not strange that there had been no recognition until names were called.

"Yet," he observed, "I saw you, Berwick, the night when you were under arrest, and thought that you looked as my sons might have done had they lived. Something strongly impelled me to help you, and when a man went to get the key of the jail, I compelled him to throw it in the creek."

Tobias Partridge's face lengthened.

He had not forgotten the incident to which Mr. Randolph referred.

The latter had taken each of his sons by the hand, and Benjamin Merton thoughtfully called the others aside. From Beatrice and Rachel he learned much about the cave, and it was planned to invade it at once.

Gun-stock and the true Dan Dixon—but Dixon no longer—had no further cause for fear, for the reaction had set in fully, and every man there felt eager to make amends for the past—all except the villains Lombard and Jackson.

The latter was in a panic, and, fearing to be classed as the War-Eagle's ally, made a full con-

fession. Among other things he said was that Lombard coveted the hand of Beatrice in marriage, but, seeing that he had no hope, he set to work to get her in his power by cunning plots.

In brief, Jackson had known that Lombard was a knave, but had never suspected he was the War-Eagle. This secret Lombard had kept from all except the old woman, Hecate, who cared for the cave. When he finally introduced men as members of his band, it was because he was ready to go out of the business, and wished to be able to keep the girl-captives away from their friends by force, if need be.

#### The cave was raided.

Bullion Baron's treasure was found, and, among it, the identical bag of gold taken from Dusky Dan—property which the latter claimed promptly, with everybody's consent.

Hecate was found, and she confessed that her master was at once Lombard and the War-Eagle.

Some of the outlaws were captured, and others escaped.

Jonas Hutchinson was found seriously wounded.

Bullion Baron's horse was taken, and, in course of time, Gun-stock proved that it was only by chance he had ridden one like it, by producing his own steed.

Lombard was taken to Digger's Folly jail. Jackson was given two hours to get out of town, and he went within the limit. Hutchinson had to be carried down the mountain on a litter.

Mordaunt Randolph had kept with his recovered sons, and all that troubled them was the fact that Mrs. Randolph, *alias* Mrs. Grake, was not able to be with them. She, however, was doing as well as could be expected.

The remarkable resemblance between Dan and Gun-stock surprised every one, and when the latter had cast off the suit of rags he wore over his regular suit, it was seen that the brothers had by chance selected garments very much alike, thus adding to the resemblance.

Beatrice was in despair. Words could not paint her humiliation. She had been very severe with "Gun-stock," and plainly expressed disbelief in his word, only to find that all he said had been true. She felt like a criminal, and was too mortified to face the world again.

She wrote him a note the following evening, begging his pardon humbly, and saying that, though she never expected to see him again, she was making atonement by tasting deep of the cup of repentance.

He answered her note—in person! He came, frank, smiling, generous and manly, and before he left she was convinced that he bore her no ill-will. But she could not forgive herself.

Time brings great changes, and the scene has changed with our characters since the day of Bullion Baron's reign in Danger Divide.

The War-Eagle was never tried for his crimes; he was shot while attempting to escape. He was a very silent man during his captivity, and gave utterance to but one pregnant remark. That was that he owed his downfall to circumstances brought upon him by his folly in trying to mix love and business.

Hutchinson died in bed, but in a miserable frame of mind, clinging in blind adoration to the money he could not take with him.

Tobias Partridge and his wife still live, but Polly no longer takes in washing. Both are aged, and are enjoying deserved rest.

Mrs. Randolph recovered, and the family so strangely re-united were as happy as any persons could be. Mordaunt built a house at Digger's Folly, and his wife made a rare mistress. Dusky Dan remained in their service.

The love of Rachel Merton and the prospector Dan Dixon—Berkeley Randolph, he must now be called—ran smoothly; so very smoothly that they were married at the expiration of a year.

As for Berwick Randolph, *alias* Gun-stock, he often went to Beatrice to say that he forgave her, and to ask if he was forgiven; and he finally suggested that the best way for them to prove that they bore no ill will was for them to get married! And this they did on the same day the other young persons joined their fortunes.

Benjamin Merton is now Mayor of Digger's Folly, and the most valuable aids he has in keeping the peace are the twin brothers—Dan Dixon and Dan Dixon's Double!

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